

THE POWER OF PUBLIC SPACE:
URBAN REVITALIZATION IN NEW YORK AND MEDELLÍN

Rachel Larson

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Jacob Wegmann, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Community and Regional Planning
School of Architecture
Supervising Professor

Gabriel Díaz Montemayor, Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture
School of Architecture
Second Reader

ABSTRACT

Author: Rachel Larson

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Supervising Professor: Jacob Wegmann, Ph.D.

The role of public space in a neighborhood cannot be emphasized enough. Regardless of cultural, economic, or social context, these communal spaces play an important role in the lives of residents. How much power do these design interventions actually have, though? Specifically, what role can design and public space play in the revitalization of urban communities? This rather complex question is one that this paper seeks to address.

In seeking an answer to this inquiry, I will consider two neighborhoods as case studies: Santo Domingo in Medellín, Colombia, and West Chelsea in New York, New York. These communities will be studied in regard to the urban interventions that dramatically re-shaped them. Within these analyses, I will look at the political and theoretical underpinnings of these projects. Additionally, I will assess the experiential and logistical effects of these interventions. Lastly, I will consider the implications that these projects have for a broader understanding of urban interventions and revitalized space.

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INTRODUCTION | ANALYZING URBAN REVITALIZATION

What makes a successful public space? Is it beauty? Functionality? Press coverage? For millennia, designers, theorists and many others have labored over this question. Their pursuit has left us with everything from grand plazas to market streets to urban pocket parks. If well-designed, these spaces are often more memorable than the buildings around them. If poorly articulated, such areas become an eyesore at best, or at worst, a danger to the public. Regardless of the outcome, there is no denying that public spaces have considerable implications for their respective urban environments.

Think about the most famous cities in the world. Often, what sets them apart are the public spaces embedded into their urban fabric. These squares, parks, and community centers may be a hub for local commerce, or perhaps they cater to a burgeoning tourist population. In many ways, public space is the lifeblood of cities, celebrating human movement, socialization, and enjoyment.

But what about cities or neighborhoods where this lifeblood is lacking? By and large, the response to such situations has been to literally bulldoze the problem, scraping blocks clean of any character or culture, before inserting an embarrassingly ignorant set of sterile, oppressive buildings in its place. This is urban renewal. Urban renewal is defined as “the rehabilitation of city areas by renovating or replacing dilapidated buildings with new housing, public buildings, parks, roadways, industrial areas, etc., often in accordance with comprehensive plans.”¹ Such projects have been largely disastrous, or have offered very little in the way of benefits for residents of these communities. Moreover, they do little to improve or provide public space.

Having acknowledged the failure of many urban renewal initiatives, planners, politicians, and designers in recent years have begun to follow a different status quo. They have begun to look at urban interventions as a catalyst for economic and social change, not simply a functional solution, thus moving

¹ “Urban Renewal,” Dictionary.com, accessed April 09, 2017, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/urban-renewal>.

toward a model of urban *revitalization*. Urban revitalization is a response to the failures of urban renewal, in that its goal is to accomplish similar improvements as its predecessor, but without the dilatory side-effects. Urban revitalization often entails the insertion of smaller projects into a neighborhood, as opposed to a comprehensive overhaul of its existing features. Rather than wipe the slate clean, the goal of urban revitalization is to take what exists in the neighborhood, add to it, and amend it in order to produce a contextually relevant solution to the problems at hand.

In this paper, I will explore urban revitalization, specifically the question as to what happens when public space is prioritized in the redevelopment of neighborhoods. I will do this by conducting case studies of two communities. The first of these neighborhoods is Santo Domingo, an informal settlement on the outskirts of Medellín, Colombia. Historically plagued by extreme poverty and cartel violence, Santo Domingo underwent a dramatic transformation at the beginning of the twenty-first century, in part because of a municipal effort to improve the neighborhood's public amenities and infrastructure.

The second case study focuses on the West Chelsea Special District (henceforth referred to as West Chelsea), an area of the Lower West Side in the New York City borough of Manhattan. This neighborhood, though markedly more affluent than Santo Domingo, experienced a similar transition when a combination of activists, designers, and municipal officials adapted abandoned infrastructure into an iconic public park. Santo Domingo and West Chelsea could not be more different from each other in terms of wealth, culture, and location. Yet, when studied side by side, these case studies reveal the power of public space, as well as the underlying themes and theories that drive such projects.

Methodology

In researching these topics, my goal is to remain as impartial and balanced as possible. That being said, I know that I still have inherent biases that are a result of my background, experiences, race, and culture. Regarding my study of Medellín, I am an outside observer, and my only knowledge of the city's culture

and context is based on research. Regarding West Chelsea, I have visited and experienced all of the spaces I describe. However, there are particular social and racial nuances surrounding the project that place me, a white member of the middle class, in a position of relative privilege. My privilege does not nullify my opinions regarding issues of race and inequality, but they likely give me a different perspective than someone who has not benefitted from social and economic systems as I have. For the sake of transparency, I want to be clear that this is the position from which I draw conclusions and make recommendations.

The format of my analysis will be organized as follows. In Chapter 1, I will discuss the urban interventions in Santo Domingo. Chapter 2 will focus on the projects that transformed West Chelsea. In both of these chapters, I closely follow a set of metrics of comparison, both qualitative and quantitative. I begin each case study by giving a brief summary of the historical, social, and political context of these projects. Both interventions owe much of their success to a powerful and cooperative mayoral administration, and the nuances of these situations are worth extensive study in and of themselves. For the purposes of this comparison, however, I will only briefly elaborate on the key players and policies in each scenario.

I will also discuss upstream factors such as any precedents or influences that led to the fruition of these projects. These underlying theories and philosophies shaped the development of both neighborhoods, and it is through the study of these perspectives that I believe one can more fully understand why and how these urban interventions were realized. Next, I will critique the architectural quality of the projects studied. Looking at both statements made by the designers and the aesthetics and functionality of these spaces, I will analyze their success. My design critique will also take into account the way in which these interventions fit into the context of their sites.

Beyond political background and design, I will also consider how well the interventions in these neighborhoods function as public space. For this part of the analysis, I borrow criteria from the Project

for Public Spaces (PPS), a nonprofit organization dedicated to designing sustainable community spaces. PPS has a long track-record of developing successful urban interventions—3,000 in 43 countries to be exact—and it currently serves as the primary resource for information regarding the design of public space.²

PPS lists four criteria that are helpful in determining the quality of a public space: (1) *sociability*, (2) *uses and activities*, (3) *access and linkages*, and (4) *comfort and image*. PPS describes *sociability* as the quality of a place that makes it a favored gathering spot for a community. A successful space should be a common meet-up point for locals. It is a place that residents regard with pride, and where the demographic mix of those who occupy it reflects that of the community at large. Regarding *uses and activities*, PPS deems projects successful when they host a wide variety of activities for a diverse audience. Such a space should rarely be empty, and should encourage social engagement rather than isolation.³

The criteria for *comfort and image* is similar in this regard, in that it also calls for an absence of empty spaces. Empty spaces, according to PPS, give rise to a sense of danger, so it is essential that areas open to the public remain consistently occupied. A space with great *comfort and image* should also be pedestrian-dominated. Those occupying the area should have plenty of places to sit, and the overall form should be visually clean and inviting. Lastly, PPS emphasizes the need for *access and linkages*. Notable public spaces should be easy to reach on foot or by public transit. They should also be wheelchair accessible and clearly visible from the street.⁴

While the PPS criteria provides a framework for an experiential assessment of a public space, these standards are lacking regarding ways in which these designs may harm or benefit a community over time. Because of this, I have added several metrics of my own. In addition to using the guidelines

² "About," Project for Public Spaces, accessed March 21, 2017, <http://www.pps.org/about/>.

³ "What Makes a Successful Place?," Project for Public Spaces, accessed March 21, 2017, <http://www.pps.org/reference/grplacefeat/>.

⁴ "What Makes a Successful Place?"

provided by PPS, I will analyze the economic impact of these projects on their respective communities. I will also discuss resident quality of life, as well as the potential for downstream effects such as gentrification. I will also consider neighborhood crime and safety, and whether or not the introduction of these public spaces affected these factors in any way.

The standards set forth by PPS also fail to adequately acknowledge the social effects that an urban intervention may have on a community. Thus, I will include in this analysis a discussion on how these projects and the processes leading up to their realization succeeded or failed to empower the local community. Lastly, I will look at the downstream effects of the changes that took place in both Santo Domingo and West Chelsea. I will consider the ways in which these projects functioned as precedents for future endeavors, as well as their ability to be replicated in other contexts. In the third and final chapter of this study, I will consider the implications of the outcome of these projects. In light of the contextual, experiential, social, and logistical aspects of these projects, I will show how urban revitalization occurred in two contrasting situations, and from there draw conclusions about what these imply for future endeavors.

CHAPTER 1 | CASE STUDY: SANTO DOMINGO, MEDELLÍN, COLOMBIA

Historical and Political Context

Medellín, Colombia, is a city long characterized by powerful drug cartels and violent crime, but this was not always the case. Prior to the drug years, Medellín played a key role in Colombia's economy due to its location on a corridor between the nation's Atlantic and Pacific ports. Medellín's success was quickly overshadowed in the 80s with the rise of the cocaine industry, which brought with it devastating social and economic effects.⁵ Under Pablo Escobar, the Medellín Cartel grew in power through a system of bribery, threats, and violence, and it was this system which came to characterize the city.

Even when the cartel saw its demise in the 90s, it left a violent legacy in its wake. At the time, Medellín's homicide rate was among the highest in the world, at 400 murders per 100,000 people.⁶ In the developed world, this number is nearly inconceivable. Chicago, for example, was considered in 2016 to have experienced an exceptionally violent year when its homicide rate rose to a mere 27.7 per 100,000 residents.⁷ Unfortunately for Medellín, the collapse of the cartel did not lead to a drop in crime. Instead, lawlessness worsened. The *barrios* on the outskirts of Medellín became the staging ground for violent clashes between right-wing paramilitaries and leftist guerillas.⁸

One such *barrio* is the neighborhood of Santo Domingo. This settlement is part of an outlying district of Medellín called Comuna Popular 1, which is known for its extreme poverty and informal settlements.⁹ Until recent years, Santo Domingo has also been known for its cartel-related violence.¹⁰ Thus, it came as a surprise to many when this neighborhood emerged at the vanguard of Medellín's

⁵ Sebastian Chaskel and Matthew Devlin, "From Fear to Hope in Colombia: Sergio Fajardo and Medellín, 2004-2007," December 10, 2010, 1.

⁶ Chaskel and Devlin, "From Fear to Hope in Colombia," 1.

⁷ Josh Sanburn and David Johnson, "See Chicago's Deadly Year in 3 Charts," *The New York Times*, January 17, 2017, , accessed March 29, 2017, <http://time.com/4635049/chicago-murder-rate-homicides/>.

⁸ Chaskel and Devlin, "From Fear to Hope in Colombia," 1.

⁹ "Division Barrial," Comuna 1 Popular - Medellín, Accessed February 11, 2017, <http://comunapopular.org/division-barrial/>.

¹⁰ Luisa Fernanda Sotomayor, *Planning through Spaces of Exception: Socio-Spatial Inequality, Violence and the Emergence of Social Urbanism in Medellín (2004-2011)*, PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2015 (Proquest Dissertations Publishing, 2015), 4.

city-wide improvement initiative. What was once a place of great danger is now hailed as a cultural icon. Even more astoundingly, it hosts a fledgling tourism industry. The work done in Santo Domingo has garnered the praise of urbanists, policy makers, and designers alike.¹¹ The question must be asked, then: what allowed for such a dramatic transformation of this impoverished neighborhood—in the span of a decade, no less?

The answer to this question is rather complex. There is much to be said for the physical design of these urban interventions. Likewise, it is equally important to understand that these renowned architectural and landscape projects would have never been realized had there not been significant political forces at play. One such factor was the inauguration of Sergio Fajardo as mayor of Medellín in 2004.¹² Fajardo, an independent candidate with a populist platform, gained the favor of the electorate with promises to seek social reform and neighborhood revitalization. The central goal of Fajardo's administration was to physically and socially redevelop the city—an ambitious task, considering the limits of his three-year term. Also unique to Fajardo's vision was the emphasis on the redevelopment of exceedingly impoverished neighborhoods. Rather than continue to overlook these parts of the city, as many of his predecessors had, Fajardo chose to confront the most problematic neighborhoods first.

The political climate during Fajardo's term both propelled his projects to success and created numerous obstacles. When he took office in 2004, Colombia's government had already worked out compromises with the remaining paramilitaries. These negotiations precipitated a steady decline in violence, so that the issue of safety was already on its way toward amelioration by the time Fajardo was in a position to do anything about it.¹³ That is not to say that Medellín did not have a crime problem at the time; violence most certainly prevailed, especially in the *barrios*. Nevertheless, the fact that the city was starting to move in a positive direction undoubtedly helped Fajardo's policies to be effective.

¹¹ Jamie Hernandez-Garcia, "Slum Tourism, City Branding and Social Urbanism: The Case of Medellín, Colombia," 48.

¹² Chaskel and Devlin, "From Fear to Hope in Colombia," 1.

¹³ Ibid., 2.

Social problems aside, one of Fajardo's greatest hurdles was Medellín's municipal legacy of unscrupulous politicians and a discouraged electorate.¹⁴ Sitting city officials, regardless of their party alignment, had long used their positions of power in their own self-interest, and they had also set a precedent for inaction.¹⁵ This obstacle, coupled with citizens who were demoralized by decades of corrupt governance, would not make Fajardo's goals easy to achieve. Fajardo thus took a calculated, thoughtful approach in addressing both the political corruption and the electorate's lack of faith in the municipal government.

One of the first tests of Fajardo's administration was gaining approval for developments from the city council. His proposal did not feed into the system of patronage politics to which the council was accustomed, but surprisingly, his plan received unanimous approval.¹⁶ This early success likely occurred for two reasons. Unlike his predecessors, Fajardo lacked political debts, and he went to great lengths to make sure that he did not incur any.¹⁷ This put him at an advantage before the city council, because its members lacked leverage to force his plans in their favor. Additionally, the election that put Fajardo into office had been nothing short of a landslide victory. Fajardo, a third-party candidate, had gained the approval of the voters without the aid of the political machines associated with the major parties, indicating that he was, for the time being, backed by the people. This confidence likely made the council think twice about directly defying the city's new leader.¹⁸

Fajardo's legacy was also characterized by transparency, which ultimately contributed to the success of his administration's projects. He wrote articles for local newspapers, participated in weekly radio interviews, and consistently offered honest assessments of his administration's work—even when progress was not as hoped. Additionally, Fajardo actively sought input from non-governmental experts

¹⁴ Chaskel and Devlin, "From Fear to Hope in Colombia," 2.

¹⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹⁶ Ibid., 4.

¹⁷ Ibid., 3.

¹⁸ Ibid., 4.

across many disciplines. During the initial planning period for Medellín's renewal, he consulted with planners, designers, and anyone else with skills that might contribute to the revitalization of the city.¹⁹

Fajardo also built trust between the municipal government and the neighborhoods that would be affected by his administration's projects.²⁰ Locals voiced their opinions at community forums and discussions. They also formed civic pacts with the government. Agreements like these put the electorate on an equal playing field with the government, in which feedback was actually valued, and politicians actually listened.²¹ Fajardo positioned himself within Medellín's political and social spheres unlike any mayor before him, and as a result, he was able to accomplish much during his three years. Without the efforts of this administration, the revitalization of Santo Domingo would not have happened as it did.

Equally as important as this political context was the urban theory that drove the strategy, design, and implementation of Fajardo's urban initiatives: *Social Urbanism*. *Social Urbanism* is an urban strategy that combines infrastructural improvements with social initiatives and participatory design.²² There are five key elements of social urbanism: (1) a geographic model derived from the Human Development Index by which policymakers can identify areas of greatest need, (2) an effort to consult, build, and manage new operations and service delivery, (3) the insertion of urban and architectural interventions for the purpose of giving these areas greater visibility, (4) the implementation of social welfare programs among these underdeveloped communities, and (5) consistent and meaningful community participation.²³ In short, *Social Urbanism* mandates that wherever a design intervention occurs, social initiatives must follow.²⁴ It is also important to note that Fajardo's efforts in Medellín were

¹⁹ Chaskel and Devlin, "From Fear to Hope in Colombia," 6.

²⁰ Ibid., 7.

²¹ Ibid., 8.

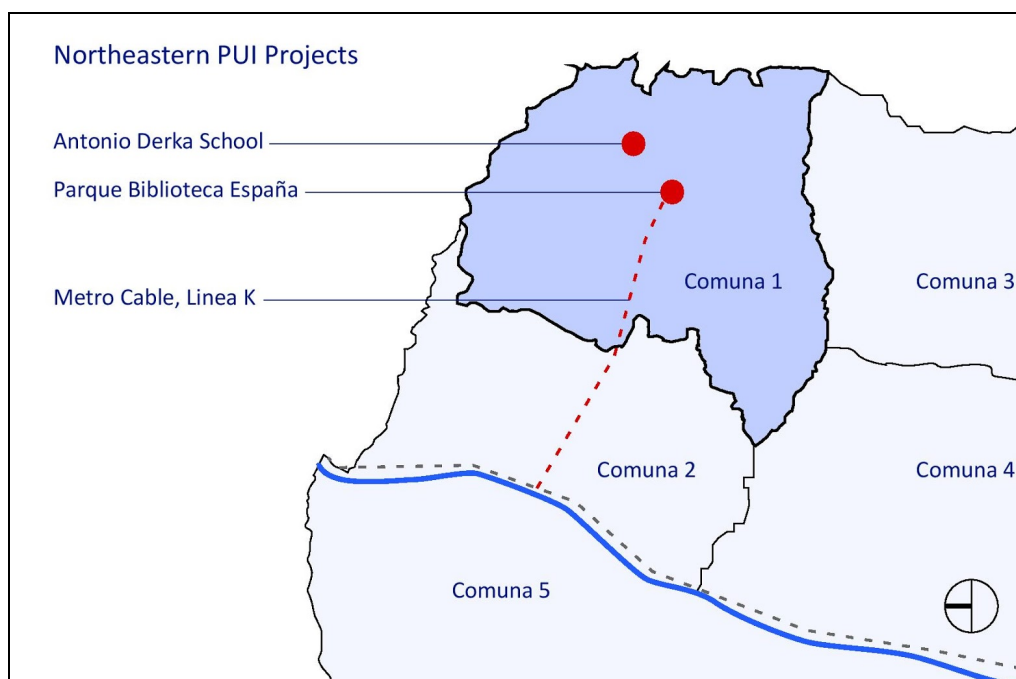
²² Camilo Calderon, "Social Urbanism - Integrated and Participatory Urban Upgrading in Medellín, Colombia," *Requalifying the Built Environment: Challenges and Responses*, edited by Lawrence, Yildiz, and Kellett, 5.

²³ Sotomayor, *Planning through Spaces of Exception*, 8.

²⁴ Calderon, "Social Urbanism," 5.

not the only instances in which *Social Urbanism* was a central focus. Around the same time, Bogotá's equally ambitious mayor, Enrique Peñalosa, was working to develop the capital city in a similar manner.²⁵

In the case of Medellín, *Social Urbanism* was realized through the implementation of *Proyectos Urbanos Integrales* (PUIs), or Integral Urban Projects. The intent of the PUIs was to provide disadvantaged neighborhoods with resources, good architecture, and social programs, in the hope that this surge of municipal effort would result in a stronger, faster transformation than had been seen in previous instances of urban upgrading.²⁶ The PUI model has three parts: (1) *physical*, such as a new public space or civic building, (2) *social*, specifically the participation of the local community in the development process, and (3) *institutional*, which involves the mobilization of existing social initiatives and programs.²⁷ With the potential to bring about radical spatial and social change, *Social Urbanism* became the framework by which Fajardo's administration worked to revitalize Medellín.



Northeastern PUI Projects in Comuna 1²⁸

²⁵ Justin McGuirk, "Colombia's Architectural Tale of Two Cities," *The Guardian*, April 11, 2012, accessed May 1, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/apr/11/colombia-architecture-bogota-medellin>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ http://archleague.org/main/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Map_PUIs.jpg.

Project Description

In keeping with the tenets of *Social Urbanism*, the revitalization plan for Santo Domingo did not entail a single project, but rather a collection of urban, architectural, and infrastructural upgrades to the neighborhood. The first such improvement, arguably also the catalyst for the development that followed, actually began before Fajardo stepped into office. Under his predecessor, Luis Perez Gutierrez, the government constructed an aerial cable car system, called the *Metro Cable*, that connected Santo Domingo to the center of Medellín.²⁹

Line K, a *Metro Cable* line with three stops, connects Santo Domingo with Acevedo, a main station along Medellín's subway system. The project cost \$24M. Cable cars may seem like an odd choice, but are favorable in this context because they are relatively affordable, technologically simple, easy to assemble, and require very little land (hence, less disruption and displacement).³⁰ The fact that such a system is elevated also diminishes difficulties associated with the difficult terrain of the neighborhood. This line was completed in 2004, just as Fajardo was sworn in as mayor, and it went on to serve as a locus of *PUI* development.³¹

One of the most well-known developments surrounding the *Metro Cable* line is Parque Biblioteca España, a library park located a short distance from the cable car's final stop on Line K. The 5,500 sq. m project was designed by Colombian architect Giancarlo Mazzanti. It was under construction for two years, after which it opened to the public in 2007. Located on a hillside overlooking the city, the library park serves as an identifying landmark, as well as a point of learning and gathering for the local community.³²

²⁹ Abraham F. Lowenthal and Pablo Rojas Mejía, "Medellín: Front Line of Colombia's Challenges," *Americas Quarterly* / *Politics, Business & Culture in the Americas*, Winter 2010.

³⁰ Peter Brand, *Aerial cable-car systems for public transport in low-income urban areas: lessons from Medellín, Colombia.*, School of Urban and Regional Planning Universidad Nacional de Colombia, July 4, 2014.

³¹ D. Osorio Gaviria, *The Northeastern Urban Integration Project [PUI] Medellín, COLOMBIA - Urban Development Agency [EDU]*, 2015, 8.

³² "España Library / Giancarlo Mazzanti."

Even at a distance, the library park is immediately recognizable because of its design, which is unconventional to say the least. Local topography is characterized by mountainous terrain, and in response to this set of conditions, Mazzanti designed the library's buildings to appear like an extension of the landscape. Rather than stick to orthogonal geometries, he drew upon the influence of natural forms to derive three bold, asymmetrical volumes that resemble boulders. These iconic triplet volumes rest on their hilly site like large rocks, seeming simultaneously architectural and an integral part of the landscape.³³



"España Library / Giancarlo Mazzanti"³⁴

Because of its unconventional design, the library has become not only a symbol for the neighborhood, but also its very focal point. Prior to the construction of the library, the steep grade of the neighborhood had hindered the development of a central square. Now, however, Parque Biblioteca España mediates this difficult and previously uninhabitable terrain. The three rock-like volumes of the library rest on a large plinth, which is built into the hillside. This platform unites the library's three buildings and it also acts as a plaza.³⁵

³³ "España Library / Giancarlo Mazzanti."

³⁴ <http://www.archdaily.com/2565/espana-library-giancarlo-mazzanti/500ed65a28ba0d0cc7000876-espana-library-giancarlo-mazzanti-image>.

³⁵ "Spain Library Park on Architizer," Architizer.

The issue of public space is addressed in other Santo Domingo projects as well. The Antonio Derka School, designed by Obranegra Arquitectos and completed in 2008, provides a much-needed gathering point for the neighborhood. Like Parque Biblioteca España, this project was particularly difficult to realize because of the site's topography. In plan, one can see that there is a 3.5m drop from one end of the site to the other, resulting in a 35% slope. Another complication of this project was that while it sat unused prior to the construction of the school, it served as an informal link between one end of the neighborhood and the other. Residents had cut paths across the then-empty lot, and they made use of them often. Thus, in addition to the difficult topography, the architects faced the challenge of preserving the functional significance of the site as a through route for neighborhood residents.³⁶



"Antonio Derka School / Obranegra Arquitectos."³⁷

Obranegra Arquitectos accomplished this task by creating a design that blurred the distinction between landscape and built form. In order to address the topographical complexity of the site,

³⁶ "Antonio Derka School / Obranegra Arquitectos," ArchDaily: The World's Most Visited Architecture Website, September 28, 2014.

³⁷ <http://www.archdaily.com/550567/colégio-antonio-derka-santo-domingo-savio-obranegra-arquitectos/5420dc9bc07a8086fc00007b-colégio-antonio-derka-santo-domingo-savio-obranegra-arquitectos-photo>

Obranegra Arquitectos proposed a design in which the school building would fit into the hillside. This design move put the roof at ground level on the upper end of the site, concealing the bulk of the building from view. Simultaneously, this gesture turns the roof into a plaza, one which extends over the site and offers breathtaking views of the city.³⁸ To replace the pedestrian paths, the architects incorporated outdoor staircases, which slip in between the building forms and preserve the original connections across the site.³⁹

Although markedly different from the Parque Biblioteca España, the Antonio Derka School also boasts a modern aesthetic. As one approaches the school from the road, the only indication of built form is a solitary white box, an auditorium that sits on top of the school's roof. This volume serves as a visual marker, much like the volume's of Mazzanti's library.⁴⁰ The accompanying rooftop plaza has a similar, clean design, which stands in stark contrast to the informal structures in the vicinity.

Both functionally and formally, Parque Biblioteca España and the Antonio Derka School challenge the notion of slum architecture. The modern, high-quality design of these facilities is the sort of work one might expect to find in the neighborhoods of the wealthy, but instead, it has been made accessible to the poor. This insertion of quality architecture into Santo Domingo's urban fabric reflects Fajardo's goal from the beginning: to provide dignity through design and social reform. Even with all of the favorable conditions surrounding these projects, it was still a fairly lofty goal to believe that these structures and spaces could fundamentally reshape Santo Domingo. In the following chapters, I will examine some of the ways in which these interventions (and the policies that accompanied them) both succeeded and failed in bringing revitalization to the neighborhood.

³⁸ "Antonio Derka School / Obranegra Arquitectos."

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Experiential Assessment

First and foremost, how did these projects function as public spaces? Regarding access to and from its site, Parque Biblioteca España owes much of its success to the presence of the *Metro Cable*. For a standard fare of Col\$1.450 (US\$0.80), residents of Santo Domingo can cut their journey between this civic landmark and the city center substantially, shortening a multi-hour walking or bus journey to a thirteen-minute cable car ride.⁴¹ The single *Metro Cable* line is but a small part of the larger, downtown-oriented transit network of Medellín, but the fact that there is any connection at all makes a substantial difference in the relationship between the library park and the city center. Access to Parque Biblioteca España is also enhanced by the design of the site. To the west of the library, the steep hillside is surmounted by a paved staircase.⁴² Around the site itself, new sidewalks prioritize the pedestrian, thereby increasing safety and wellbeing.

The Antonio Derka school can be reached on the same cable car line, though it requires an additional fifteen-minute uphill walk.⁴³ From the limited satellite images available, it seems that there is a continuous sidewalk between the *Metro Cable* stop and the school, making pedestrian access significantly easier. The aforementioned outdoor stairs and walking paths also preserve helpful East-West connections across the site.⁴⁴ In general, these projects are largely accessible, at least in comparison to their neighborhood. In all of my research there was nothing said about wheelchair accessibility or other disability accommodations, so I cannot speak to that. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the completion of these projects created for the first time a permanent link between Santo Domingo and the center of Medellín, crossing social and topographical barriers that had been in place until then.

⁴¹ Brand, *Aerial cable-car systems for public transport*, 5.

⁴² "Medellín, Colombia," Map, *Google Maps*, Google, 28 March 2017, <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Medellín,+Antioquia,+Colombia/@6.2686734,-75.6664326,12z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x8e4428ef4e52dddb:0x722fd6c39270ac72!8m2!3d6.244203!4d-75.5812119>.

⁴³ "Medellín, Colombia," Map, *Google Maps*, Google.

⁴⁴ "Antonio Derka School / Obranegra Arquitectos."

These projects are also generally successful in terms of comfort and image. As mentioned before, the modern aesthetic of these projects lends them a certain degree of architectural prestige. There are certainly debates as to whether or not they are beautiful, but there is a general consensus among commentators of Santo Domingo's improvements that the design of these projects is something to be proud of. Moreover, the siting of both Parque Biblioteca España and the Antonio Derka School creates a comfortable atmosphere. Both projects provide access to green space, fresh air, and calming views. The lower levels of the Antonio Derka School also provide a shaded outdoor deck.⁴⁵

Another important aspect to consider is the sociability of these sites, as well as the ways in which they are occupied and used. Socially speaking, both projects are quite successful. Locals regularly use both the library park and the school, and both have also become tourist attractions. Along with this comes a certain degree of civic pride in Santo Domingo which, prior to the construction of these projects, was not nearly as prevalent.

The success of these designs may be largely owed to the social agendas that accompanied them, for it was through these mechanisms that both the school and the library park came to host a variety of community-centric activities. Programmatically speaking, Parque Biblioteca España is both a standard library and a unique place of community engagement. The project includes a library, spaces for administrative work and training, and an auditorium.⁴⁶ The building containing the auditorium acts as an entertainment venue, but it also functions as the gathering space for the community when there is a need to discuss pressing neighborhood issues. In addition to these services, the library also contains spaces for a daycare center, an art gallery, and internet access.⁴⁷ On a less utilitarian level, the surrounding park landscape has become a place of gathering in the community. On a nice day, locals can

⁴⁵ "Antonio Derka School / Obranegra Arquitectos."

⁴⁶ "España Library / Giancarlo Mazzanti."

⁴⁷ Noémie Schwaller, "Parque Biblioteca España," Architonic, October 08, 2009.

be seen walking around the park, taking in the views, and engaging in a variety of informal recreational activities.

The auditorium at the Antonio Derka School also serves a similar civic function. In addition, the school functions as a place of learning for over one thousand students.⁴⁸ In the surrounding site, terraces and generous walkways provide spaces for respite and relaxation. Two soccer fields directly adjacent to the school also serve as a place of social engagement. In both of these *PUI* projects, we see instances in which well-funded, modern architectural projects were designed in a way that benefitted the residents of an impoverished community. Perhaps the success of these projects is due to the embedded effort to include the community of Santo Domingo and prioritize the needs, desires, and dignity of residents.

Quality of Life & Community Empowerment

From a design perspective, it is widely acknowledged that the Santo Domingo neighborhood has undergone radical development, but what effect have these changes had on the residents themselves? If we declare the *PUIs* in Santo Domingo successful solely because they offer a new aesthetic to the *barrio*, then we have overlooked the most important reason for pursuing the interventions in the first place: the people. It is in regard to both quality of life and empowerment, then, that we must investigate the effects of the *Northeastern PUI* on the residents of Santo Domingo.

Financially speaking, the *Northeastern PUI* was remarkably well-managed. The Fajardo administration carefully allocated city resources, emphasized sectoral investment, and promoted transparency and coordination between the entities involved in the *PUI*. These methods were also carried out with great fiscal responsibility. As of 2009, the monetary investment in the *Northeastern PUI* was nearly US \$6M.⁴⁹ This is a modest sum compared to the budgets for many U.S. projects, but despite

⁴⁸ “Antonio Derka School / Obranegra Arquitectos.”

⁴⁹ D. Osorio Gaviria, *The Northeastern Urban Integration Project [PUI] Medellín, COLOMBIA - Urban Development Agency [EDU]*, 2015, 17.

these constraints, the end results of the *Northeastern PUI* were quite extensive. Even with labor and material costs being lower in Colombia than in the U.S., it is no small feat to fit a library, school, cable car system, and various smaller infrastructural improvements into a budget of US \$6M.

Unfortunately, the redevelopment of Santo Domingo also brought about problems regarding housing. As zones within Santo Domingo were designated for redevelopment, several families became faced with relocation. Medellín's Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano (EDU) gave these families two options: (1) relocation to a housing development in a different *barrio*, or (2) monetary compensation according to the value of their homes.⁵⁰ This strategy seems equitable at first glance, but it created several problems of its own. Those who chose to be relocated found that their new neighborhood put them more than an hour's journey from Santo Domingo. Their move effectively isolated them from their community. Those who opted to receive monetary compensation found themselves priced out of the housing market, as the combination of the *Metro Cable* and the *Northeastern PUI* precipitated a doubling of property values over the course of Fajardo's term.⁵¹

Despite these issues of displacement, the residents who managed to stay had the opportunity to enjoy several neighborhood improvements. For instance, in addition to improving transit times for nearly ten percent of trips to and from the *barrio*, the *Metro Cable* was a gesture of significant symbolic value. At its core, the gondola system directly links the rich and poor areas of Medellín.⁵² A connection between the notorious informal settlement and the heart of Medellín pushes back against the stigma associated with the *barrio*, bringing Santo Domingo one step closer to being acknowledged as a legitimate part of the city.⁵³

The improvements in Santo Domingo, as a result of both urban interventions and social programs, can also be seen in an analysis of the neighborhood's Quality of Life Index (QLI). QLI is a

⁵⁰ Sotomayor, *Planning through Spaces of Exception*, 196.

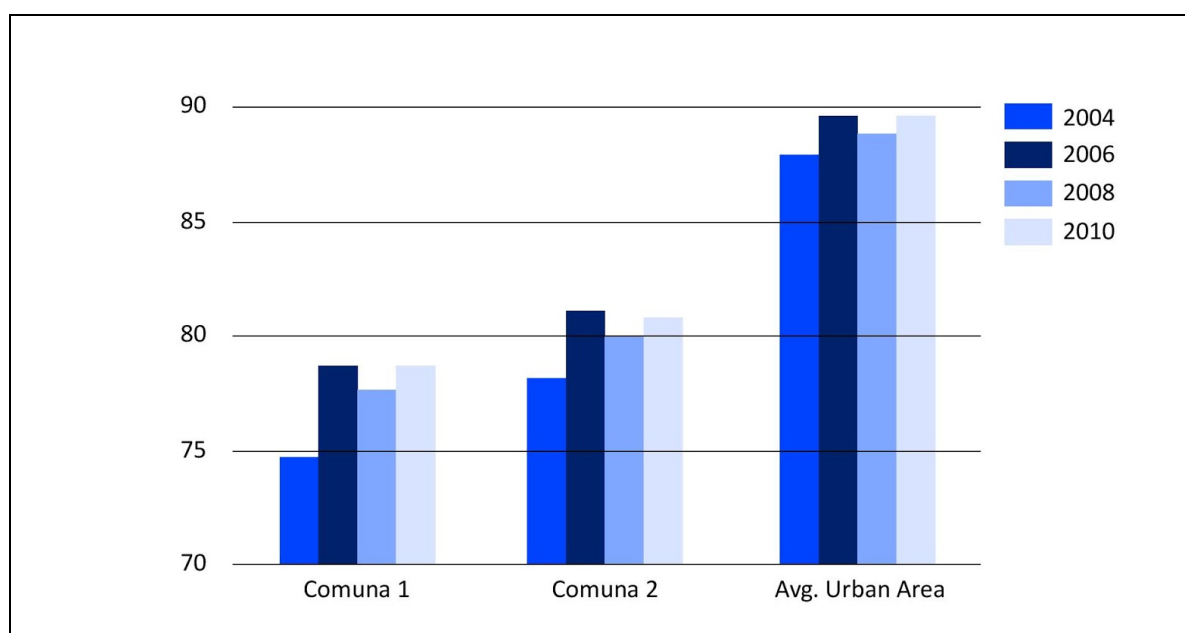
⁵¹ Ibid., 196.

⁵² Schwaller, "Parque Biblioteca España."

⁵³ Gaviria, *The Northeastern Urban Integration Project*, 15.

multidimensional metric for assessing a community's access to goods and services. Human Development Index (HDI), a more widely-known metric developed by the United Nations Development Program, considers life expectancy, education, and income. Both perspectives are essential for understanding the progress (or lack thereof) in a neighborhood, and in the case of Santo Domingo, both show a positive trend that correlates with the implementation of the *Northeastern PUI*.⁵⁴

In 2004, when the *Northeastern PUI* began, the QLI in Comuna 1, the zone in which Santo Domingo is located, was 73.5, a low figure compared to the index for the city as a whole, which at the time was 82.7.⁵⁵ By 2006, Comuna 1 had an index of 76.2. In 2008, this number dipped down to 75.4, most likely due to the end of construction-related jobs, as the major projects had just been completed.⁵⁶ However, by 2010, the neighborhood boasted a QLI of 76.3.⁵⁷ From 2004 to 2010, Comuna 1's QLI rose by 2.8 points, or 3.8% increase, while the average increase for the entire city was only 1.3%.⁵⁸



Quality of Life Index (QLI), Comuna 1 (2004-2010)⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Sotomayor, *Planning through Spaces of Exception*, 186.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 185.

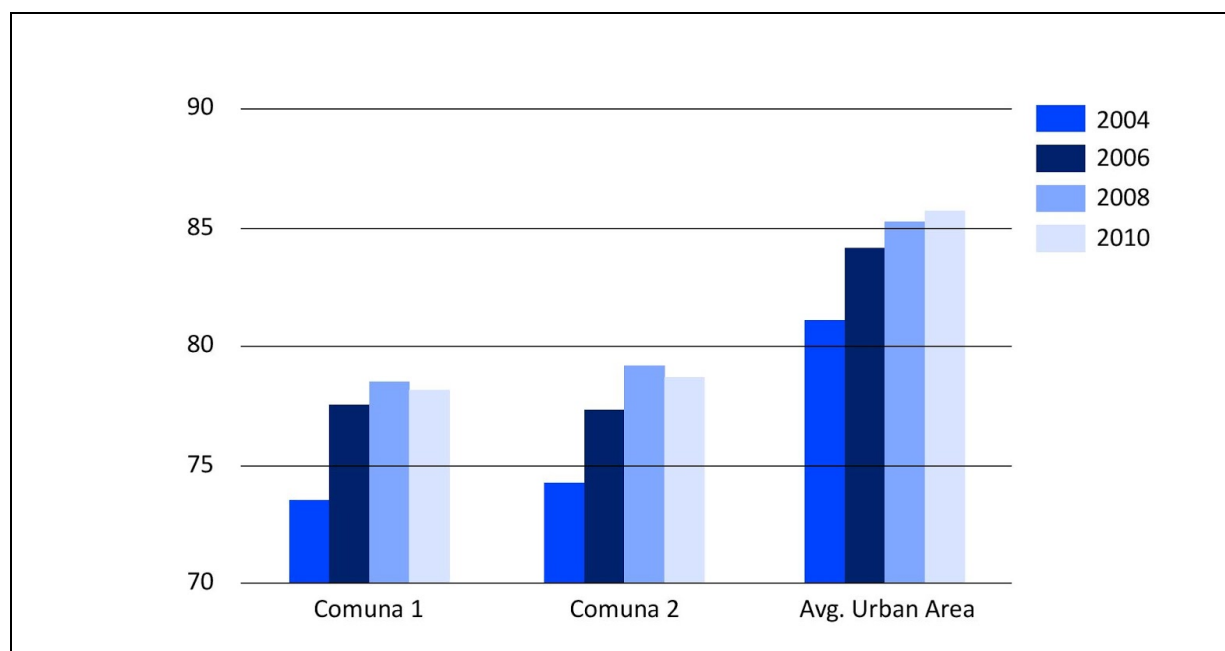
⁵⁶ Ibid., 186.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 185.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 185-186.

Measurements of HDI for Comuna 1 show a similar trend, with a 6% increase during the same time period. It is important to note, however, that this is barely higher than the 5.5% increase seen across the rest of the city.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, one can see that the greatest increase in HDI occurred from 2004 to 2006, during the time that the *Northeastern PUI* was being implemented. This certainly seems to support the idea that the *Northeastern PUI* played a key role in the improvement of Comuna 1.



Human Development Index (HDI), Comuna 1 (2004-2010)⁶¹

Residents of Comuna 1 were also surveyed for their opinions regarding the changes to their neighborhood. Most of those interviewed praised the decline in gang activity and violence, and they also expressed pride for the new beautification and infrastructural projects. There were few complaints overall. It still stands to be noted, however, that interviewees consistently criticized the government's role in the aforementioned instances of displacement.⁶²

Along with quality of life, community empowerment increased throughout the work of the

⁶⁰ Sotomayor, *Planning through Spaces of Exception*, 186.

⁶¹ Ibid., 186.

⁶² Ibid., 192.

Fajardo administration. This success can be traced to an emphasis on community education, participation, and communication that was central to Medellín's *PUIs*.⁶³ Without these three aspects of community involvement, it would have been quite difficult to form proposals that both benefitted the public and gave residents a sense of ownership over what was being done to their neighborhood.⁶⁴ Furthermore, given the grim history of embezzlement and corruption, Fajardo would not have been able to gain the support of the Santo Domingo residents unless they were involved enough to see where funds and resources were actually going.

Fajardo's dedication to restoring the faith of the public in municipal government was evident in the ways in which he both opened the floor for communication and offered transparent assessments of the government's progress. He fostered open communication by forming "civic pacts" with locals, agreements which allowed citizens to speak up about how government activities might impact their lives and communities.⁶⁵ These pacts entailed frequent face-to-face meetings with community members. Representatives from Fajardo's administration presented the city's *PUI* proposals, gathered feedback from locals, and worked to gain support from the community.⁶⁶

Once the community residents' concerns had been adequately addressed, they signed an agreement with the municipal government, in which Fajardo's administration promised to realize the project, and the community pledged their participation therein.⁶⁷ Afterwards, government workers distributed printed copies of the agreement throughout the neighborhood as both a public notice as well as a symbol of their commitment to the pact.⁶⁸ This people-first approach restored the eroded trust of the electorate, and helped ensure that any *PUIs* would reflect the voice of the people rather than a detached governmental agenda.

⁶³ Gaviria, 17.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁵ Chaskel and Devlin, "From Fear to Hope in Colombia," 7.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

In addition to establishing a sense of ownership among participants, the “civic pacts” were also designed as opportunities for learning. Community meetings between local residents and members of the Fajardo administration demonstrated to the electorate the importance of government-community collaboration.⁶⁹ These meetings also demonstrated to the people of Santo Domingo that they had as much to offer as their government did when it came to the development of their community.

This second realization shattered the classist mentality that had long cast the *barrios* in an unfavorable light, and for the first time in decades, some of the poorest, most marginalized citizens of Medellín had both a platform and a voice. In Fajardo’s words, “When people feel that they are included in what is happening, their reaction is always positive. We said, 'Let's do it together,' and, for the very first time, I think many voices were heard that hadn't been taken into account before.”⁷⁰ His words ring true with what actually occurred in Santo Domingo, as citizens were made to realize their potential as active, engaged participants in the betterment of their city.

The *PUI* work in Santo Domingo also brought about empowerment by way of transparency. Fajardo allowed the public to participate in the budgeting and planning for the project, even allowing small funds to be allocated according to the community’s preferences.⁷¹ Furthermore, Fajardo went out of his way to make sure that the historically common trends of corruption and extortion did not taint the effectiveness of the projects. With the city council, he refused to tolerate patronage requests. Regarding the electorate, Fajardo published the progress of these works in newspapers, websites, and various other modes of mass communication. He also published reports regarding these projects on an annual basis.⁷²

Further transparency arose at the intersection of tax revenue and anti-corruption initiatives. In order to boost public trust in municipal spending, Fajardo’s administration placed signs at the *PUI*

⁶⁹ Chaskel and Devlin, "From Fear to Hope in Colombia," 8.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 8.

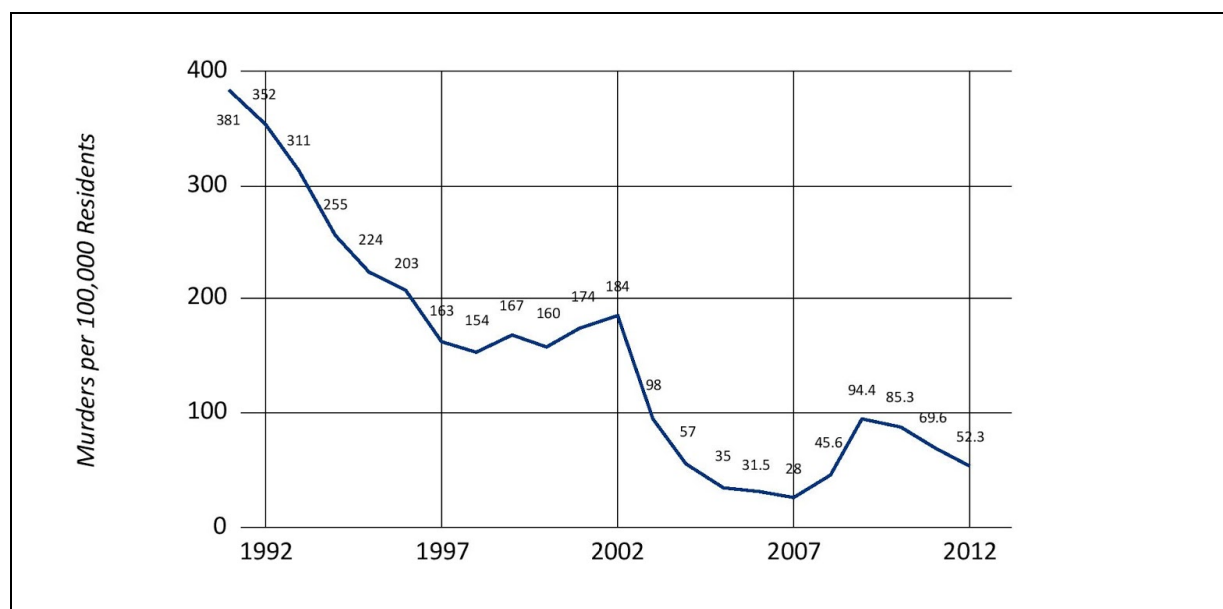
⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

construction sites, each of which included a project description as well as a detailed account of how much funding was being used and how. Citizens were thus able to see the results of their tax payments, and more importantly, they could be assured that they were not going directly to the politicians themselves.⁷³

Crime and Economic Development

Since the implementation of the *PUIs* in Santo Domingo, the neighborhood has progressed significantly—but it has also continued to deal with issues of crime and violence. There are many opinions regarding the causes of these struggles or the mitigation thereof, but perhaps the underlying theme is this: urban upgrading cannot completely solve a community's troubles. Crimes in the vicinity of Parque Biblioteca España have diminished, and there is an overall greater feeling of security. Because of this increased sense of safety, tourists and visitors are now commonplace.⁷⁴



Medellín Homicide Rate (1991-2012)

Unfortunately, in recent years there has been a resurgence in crime. According to a 2010 article, crime rates in Medellín rose dramatically during 2008, after Fajardo's term had ended, and the trend only

⁷³ Chaskel and Devlin, "From Fear to Hope in Colombia," 8.

⁷⁴ Hernandez-Garcia, "Slum Tourism, City Branding and Social Urbanism: The Case of Medellín, Colombia," 48.

continued into 2009. City leaders attributed the recurrence of this problem to the continued struggle with paramilitary entities.⁷⁵ While this is troubling, it is still important to look at these changes in the context of what Santo Domingo's crime rates have historically been. These recent increases are actually quite minor compared to the neighborhood's statistics in the early 90s.

Regarding city-wide murder rates, for instance, Medellín saw an all-time low of 28 homicides per 100,000 residents in 2007. This number rose to 94.4 in 2009, but this is still far below the statistics for 1991, when the homicide rate was 381 per 100,000 inhabitants. Moreover, since 2009, the number of murders has once again been on the decline, and hopefully the trend will stay this way.⁷⁶ As with any informal settlement, the question of crime remains unresolved. However, economic conditions for the neighborhood are certainly looking hopeful. Once again, the value of the *Metro Cable* cannot be emphasized enough. In the immediate vicinity of the cable car's final stop, economic opportunities abound. The *Northeastern PUI* created 3,439 construction jobs, 92% of which were given to local residents.⁷⁷

These employment opportunities ended when the *Northeastern PUI*, but fortunately, the changes to the Santo Domingo neighborhood also brought about permanent economic change. In the case of Parque Biblioteca España, for instance, new shops and vendors have appeared in its immediate vicinity. Sotomayor estimates that approximately 2,400 new businesses have opened as a result of the development in Santo Domingo.⁷⁸ What was once a place of dire poverty is now populated with restaurants, shops, and even banks.⁷⁹ Additionally, the library park's growing reputation as a tourist destination means that more individuals are coming to the *barrio*, and by extension, are spending more at local businesses. These economic changes have led to a perceptible shift in the neighborhood's aura.

⁷⁵ Lowenthal and Mejía, "Medellín: Front Line of Colombia's Challenges."

⁷⁶ Sotomayor, *Planning through Spaces of Exception*, 187.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 185.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Lowenthal and Mejía, "Medellín: Front Line of Colombia's Challenges."

Residents note that the zones nearest to the library feel more lively than before, and that on the weekends, one might even describe them as festive.⁸⁰

Recent Press & Downstream Effects

The general consensus is that the effects of the *Northeastern PUI* in Santo Domingo have been positive. For its bold aesthetic, community function, and role in the revitalization of Santo Domingo, Parque Biblioteca España has been the subject of much acclaim. The Antonio Derka School has also received positive recognition. It remains prudent to be cautious about such projects, as they resulted in scattered instances of displacement and rises in property values. Nevertheless, increased property value is not necessarily bad. When positive change occurs in a neighborhood, a hike in property values is inevitable, as the area becomes more desirable for working and living. Static property values would actually indicate that the neighborhood is not seeing the desired improvements.

Displacement is an issue that can be spotted early on. There are some problems, however, that take time to be revealed. In the case of Parque Biblioteca España, concerns have grown in recent years over several logistical aspects of the project. A 2014 article for *Colombia Reports*, the country's most-trusted English news source, references a year-long period during which the library's iconic volumes underwent extensive repairs. The renovations mainly concerned the library's facade. This outer shell, which is part of a double-skin assembly, is clad in oxidized slate bricks. According to engineer Jospeg Farbiarz, this slate tile system is neither wind-resistant nor waterproof.⁸¹

The problematic skin has since been removed entirely, not only because of the aforementioned issues with the cladding, but also because it was discovered that the underlying structure of the buildings had not been built according to Mazzanti's specifications.⁸² These discrepancies call into

⁸⁰ Hernandez-Garcia, "Slum Tourism, City Branding and Social Urbanism," 48.

⁸¹ Alexandra Jolly, "Social Project Turned Eyesore: Medellín's Biblioteca de España," *Colombia News | Colombia Reports*, April 11, 2014, <http://colombiareports.com/biblioteca-de-espana/>.

⁸² Pola Mora, "La Biblioteca España de Giancarlo Mazzanti luce hoy completamente desnuda," *ArchDaily: El sitio web de arquitectura más leído en español*, February 10, 2017, <http://www.archdaily.mx/mx/805108/la-biblioteca-espana-de-giancarlo-mazzanti-luce-hoy-completamente-desnuda>.

question the structural integrity of the library, and as a result, it is currently being tested for seismic vulnerability.⁸³ Unless the results of these tests are favorable, renovations of the facade will continue to be postponed. Sadly, the project that has been hailed for its social and architectural success now faces the consequences of severe quality-control issues. While there may be differing opinions as to who is culpable, there is a shared frustration among all those involved over the effects of shoddy construction on an otherwise exemplary building.

Logistical setbacks aside, this *PUI* remains significant for its role in *Social Urbanism* discourse, as well as the influence that it has had both on its city, and on slum upgrading in general. In the wake of the *Northeastern PUI's* success, Fajardo's successors have sought to continue the redevelopment of Medellín. Aníbal Gaviria, Medellín's current mayor, recently initiated the construction of a 46-mile greenbelt along the perimeter of the city.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, this project has received backlash because it calls for the relocation of several residents, who currently live where the proposed greenbelt is to go.⁸⁵

Relocation is a topic that has come up several times in the discussion of Santo Domingo, and I believe it deserves some consideration. In cases like Santo Domingo, where all or most available land is already occupied, displacement is necessary if there is to be adequate space for these projects to be built in the first place. Thus, while many planners and designers would agree that displacement ought to be avoided as much as possible, there is also reason to believe that it is an inevitable side-effect of neighborhood upgrading. With this in mind, I feel that it is more important to look at (1) whether displacement was kept to a minimum and (2) how those who were relocated were treated, rather than whether or not displacement occurred in general. The aforementioned greenbelt has yet to be constructed, so there is no current information on how relocatees will be treated. In light of this, the resistance to this project seems somewhat premature.

⁸³ Mora, "La Biblioteca España de Giancarlo Mazzanti luce hoy completamente desnuda," ArchDaily: El sitio web de arquitectura más leído en español.

⁸⁴ Brand, *Aerial cable-car systems for public transport*, 195.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Relocation aside, it is important to emphasize the effect that the *Northeastern PUI* has had on development in Medellín. The project's success has inspired similar efforts, both in Santo Domingo and throughout the city. One such initiative is Unidades de Vida Articulada (UVA). UVA is a series of projects built on land set aside for infrastructural purposes, such as hosting water tanks. Water tanks rarely take up all of the allotted plots of land, so EPM, the utility company that serves Medellín, proposed developing the excess space for the good of the surrounding community.⁸⁶ Using a similar set of goals that the Fajardo administration had for the *Northeastern PUI*, EPM has involved itself with local communities, relying on participatory design strategies to ensure that the resulting projects will be beneficial. During the first phase of the UVA projects, 2013-2015, EPM employees hosted workshops, community meetings, and gatherings where residents could share their ideas for everything from the name of the particular UVA project to its form and function.⁸⁷

Since the start of this initiative, twelve UVA projects have been built on infrastructural land, including one in Santo Domingo, called UVA Tanque Santo Domingo.⁸⁸ UVA Tanque Santo Domingo is located a short distance up the hill from the Antonio Derka School, and like the educational facility, it provides useful north-south and east-west connections within the neighborhood. A series of ramps handles the steep topography of the site, linking nearby streets to each other. Additionally, two buildings serve as a community center, thus transforming underutilized land into a place of social and civic engagement.⁸⁹

This community center, which opened in December 2015, has a rich program of activities for the nearly 30,500 residents that it serves, both in Santo Domingo and in adjacent *barrios*.⁹⁰ The site features

⁸⁶ EPM, "Unidades de Vida Articulada (UVA)," Proyecto UVA, accessed April 09, 2017, <http://www.epm.com.co/site/Nuestrosproyectos/ProyectoUVA.aspx>.

⁸⁷ EPM, "Unidades de Vida Articulada (UVA)."

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ EPM, "UVA Santo Domingo," UVA Santo Domingo, accessed April 09, 2017, <http://www.epm.com.co/site/Home/Proyectossostenibles/UVA Santo Domingo.aspx#Planos-1025>.

⁹⁰ Killy Gutiérrez Guzman, "UVA entrega diversión en Santo Domingo," *El Mundo*, December 20, 2015, http://www.elmundo.com/portal/noticias/territorio/uva_entrega_diversion_en_santo_domingo.php#.WOp4uNlyuM8.

playground areas, gardens, an urban gym, and recreational fountains. The buildings themselves host everything from classes to theater performances and lectures.⁹¹ Overall, UVA Tanque Santo Domingo is well-loved by residents of the neighborhood, and similar UVA projects have also received a positive reception in other parts of Medellín.

While there are certainly downsides to the *Northeastern PUI*, particularly isolated instances of displacement and logistical construction errors, the projects in Santo Domingo have been nothing short of revolutionary. For the first time in Medellín's history, the revitalization of a slum was prioritized over improvements to wealthier parts of the city. Classist prejudices still exist in Medellín, but the city has come a long way by accepting the informal settlement as a legitimate part of its urban fabric.

The work of the Fajardo administration in Santo Domingo also gave members of this community a voice. Fajardo's administration treated residents of Santo Domingo with respect, giving them an open platform to discuss their needs, desires, and concerns. This consideration for the public is clear in the final designs. The network of paths through the Antonio Derka School, for instance, is a direct result of the community's desire to preserve existing connections. Design decisions such as these show respect for the Santo Domingo community, and they also give residents a sense of ownership over the projects.

In my opinion, what took place in Santo Domingo speaks to the power of architecture and design to alter both the way the world sees a community, and how that community sees itself. Rather than being built with cost and efficiency as the main determinants, the school, library park, and community center in Santo Domingo were designed with great attention to aesthetics and flow of spaces. In this way, such projects demonstrate that great architecture is not just for the wealthy; it is for poor as well, and for those who until recently were not considered legitimate residents of the city. Through the *Northeastern PUI*, a struggling community was given a voice—and a hope for a better future.

⁹¹ Guzman, "UVA entrega diversión en Santo Domingo."

CHAPTER 2 | WEST CHELSEA SPECIAL DISTRICT, NEW YORK, NEW YORK, UNITED STATES

Historical and Political Context

Thousands of miles away, in a context far-removed both physically and economically from the extreme poverty of Santo Domingo, there exists another urban neighborhood which, at first glance, could not be more different: West Chelsea. Located on the Lower West Side of Manhattan, West Chelsea has a long and interesting social history. In recent years, the neighborhood has gained notoriety due to the opening of the High Line, an elevated park that weaves for 1.5 miles through a dense network of streets, old industrial buildings, and new high-rises.⁹² Just as the various interventions in Santo Domingo have given it a new face, the High Line has dramatically reshaped West Chelsea, both socially and economically.

The High Line is built on the repurposed structure of an elevated rail track, which had been abandoned for decades after it was no longer needed for industrial purposes.⁹³ Since its opening in 2009, the High Line's reception defied even the most ambitious hopes of its supporters. The project attracts more than four million tourists annually, has so far created an additional property tax revenue of \$900 million, and has also catalyzed a dramatic transformation of the surrounding neighborhood.⁹⁴ Given its location in an affluent part of Manhattan, as well as the wealthier demographic to which it caters, the High Line stands in stark contrast to the work of Fajardo's administration in Medellín. Nevertheless, these projects are similar in that they both owe their success to municipal and civic cooperation.

In order to understand the factors that contributed to the High Line's success, it is necessary to revisit its historical roots. When the High Line was constructed in the 1930s, it was nothing like the celebrated pedestrian park that it is today. It was a freight rail line, specifically routed through areas in

⁹² John Rainey, "New York's High Line Park: An Example of Successful Economic Development," *The Leading Edge*, Fall 2014, accessed February 02, 2017, <http://greenplayllc.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/High Line.pdf>.

⁹³ Kate Ascher and Sabina Uffer, *The High Line Effect*, Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, CTBUH Research Paper, 2015, accessed February 02, 2017, <http://global.ctbuh.org/resources/papers/download/2463-the-high-line-effect.pdf>.

⁹⁴ Rainey, "New York's High Line Park: An Example of Successful Economic Development."

the then-industrial Meatpacking District that would benefit from access to the line. It also steered clear of the more affluent areas of Manhattan, because citizens did not like the dark shadows that the track's silhouette cast on the street directly beneath it.⁹⁵ Thus, this elevated railroad was contained by 10th and 11th Avenue to the East and West, and 16th and 30th St. to the North and South.⁹⁶ In the decades that followed its initial construction, the High Line became an integral part of New York's booming industrial economy.

The railroad was used in this manner until 1980; between that time and the opening of the High Line Park in 2009, it was abandoned, sporadically occupied by only graffiti artists and the most adventurous of individuals.⁹⁷ As the Meatpacking District deteriorated toward the end of the twentieth century, the High Line also became a symbol of the city's decline. The High Line brooded over the then-derelict Lower West Side, which at the time was known for seedy bars, crime, and disreputable nightclubs. Most New Yorkers stayed away far from the blocks between 10th Avenue and the Hudson waterfront.⁹⁸

Gradually, West Chelsea began to transition. The BDSM and sex clubs that proliferated in the area in the 70s and 80s were pushed out by a 1985 initiative under the Koch administration. The loss of these venues allowed the neighborhood to have a chance at revitalization. Subsequent openings of restaurants and galleries attracted a young, trendy crowd, thus adding momentum to the neighborhood's transformation.⁹⁹ Even in the wake of Mayor Koch's crackdown on the sex industry, however, city officials still saw the High Line as an impediment to the neighborhood's progress. Starting in the 80s, they made several attempts to pass legislation that would allow them to tear down the

⁹⁵ Rainey.

⁹⁶ Mariela Quintana, "Changing Grid: Exploring the Impact of the High Line," *Street Easy* (web blog), August 08, 2016, accessed February 02, 2017, <http://streeteasy.com/blog/changing-grid-high-line/>.

⁹⁷ Kevin Loughran, "Parks for Profit: The High Line, Growth Machines, and the Uneven Development of Urban Public Spaces," *City & Community* 13, no. 1 (March 2014): 54, accessed February 7, 2017.

⁹⁸ Loughran, "Parks for Profit: The High Line, Growth Machines, and the Uneven Development of Urban Public Spaces," 54.

⁹⁹ Quintana, "Changing Grid: Exploring the Impact of the High Line."

remaining structure, but they were consistently met with resistance from activists, who believed that the High Line could be restored.¹⁰⁰ In the end, the restoration of the High Line came about through the collaboration of activists, a public-private funding alliance, and the city of New York itself.¹⁰¹ It was activism in particular that protected the High Line from demolition and created the vision for its future.

By the early 90s, both those who sought to demolish the High Line and those who believed in its potential faced a number of difficulties. Federal regulations from the Surface Transportation Board prevented removal of the High Line unless it was classified as abandoned, and even if it achieved this status, it would cost Conrail, the then-owner of the structure, more than \$30 million to take it down.¹⁰² Frustrated by the negative effects that the dilapidated High Line was having on the neighborhood, the Giuliani administration went as far as to support a lawsuit against Conrail in which Chelsea Property Owners, a local business lobby, sought to sue Conrail for leaving the High Line intact.¹⁰³

Legal tensions increased toward the end of the decade. In 1999, Conrail was acquired by CSX, a transportation and logistics conglomerate, and unfortunately, CSX was unprepared to continue the legal struggle with the city. That year, CSX appeased the city by agreeing to work on repairs to the High Line. CSX also expressed an interest in redevelopment of the High Line. When the company mentioned the idea of turning the infrastructural remnant into a park at a community board meeting for Chelsea and the West Village, residents Robert Hammond and Joshua David decided that they would work to see this concept realized.

It is important to note that the High Line Park was not the first of its kind. The Promenade Plantée, a similar intervention in Paris, France, had been open to the public since the mid-nineties. This elevated park extends for nearly three miles along a 19th century railway viaduct.¹⁰⁴ Since its opening,

¹⁰⁰ Loughran, 54.

¹⁰¹ Rainey.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ "Promenade Plantée – The First Elevated Park in the World," European Trips and Traveling Guides, September 08, 2016, , accessed March 10, 2017, <http://europeantrips.org/promenade-plantee-the-first-elevated-park-in-the-world.html>.

the Parisian park has served as a link between key districts, and for the most part, it has been widely acclaimed by both residents and tourists. Even in its dilapidated state, the High Line showed promise as a similar kind of park, and it was this hope that motivated David and Hammond to protect it. Inspired by the success of the Promenade Plantée, they went on to found Friends of the High Line, a community of activists who hoped to see the infrastructural relic transformed into a vibrant part of the city.¹⁰⁵

While neither David nor Hammond personally carried significant political clout, they had friends who did. One of their first decisions in the planning of the High Line's redevelopment was to partner with Phil Aarons, a developer who had a wealth of experience in addition to many government contacts. Using Aarons' influence, Friends of the High Line managed to gain support from wealthy donors and file a lawsuit against the city of New York to prevent it from tearing the High Line down.¹⁰⁶

Fortunately for Friends of the High Line, the political climate of New York changed in their favor in 2002, when Michael Bloomberg began his term as the city's mayor.¹⁰⁷ Bloomberg, unlike Giuliani, supported the redevelopment of the High Line, mainly because he saw the park as a potential catalyst for the city's economy, which at the time was struggling in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Additionally, several positions within the Bloomberg administration were occupied by individuals who had supported Friends of the High Line from the beginning. Leveraging these relationships, David and Hammond pitched their idea for the High Line's renewal to the Bloomberg administration as a package guaranteed to bring great economic reward.¹⁰⁸

David and Hammond's efforts were met with success. The Bloomberg administration had already been eyeing several other economic possibilities, such as a bid for the 2012 Summer Olympics and the de-zoning of industrial Manhattan, and the redevelopment of the High Line seemed to fit

¹⁰⁵ David Halle and Elisabeth Tao, "Chapter Three: The High Line," in *New York's New Edge* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 160.

¹⁰⁶ Loughran, 55.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Loughran, 56.

perfectly with these goals. The mayor accepted David and Hammond's proposal, in hope that between these three initiatives, New York would experience an economic turnaround.¹⁰⁹

After this initial hurdle, the details began to fall into place for the redevelopment of the High Line. Friends of the High Line spent most of 2002 and 2003 conducting a study proving the economic viability of the project. Once this analysis was completed, the organization went on to explore the possibilities of a design competition for the park.¹¹⁰ They reviewed submissions over the next year, before finally awarding the job to James Corner Field Operations, a landscape architecture firm; Diller Scofidio + Renfro (DSR), an architecture firm; and Piet Oudolf, a planting designer.¹¹¹

There were several obstacles to overcome before the park could become a reality, but fortunately for Friends of the High Line, a series of timely decisions gave them reason to believe that their efforts would soon pay off. In 2005, CSX donated the High Line to the City of New York. Around the same time, the Surface Transportation Board ruled in favor of redeveloping the High Line. Furthermore, the Bloomberg Administration took further steps to ensure the High Line's success when it designated the West Chelsea Special District. This decision rezoned the blocks bounded by 10th and 11th Avenues and West 16th and West 30th streets, thereby opening up the lots surrounding the High Line for mixed-use and residential development.¹¹²

This zoning ordinance wasn't simply a call for new construction; in designating the West Chelsea Special District, it both protected existing instances of neighborhood charm, such as galleries and historical buildings, and also allowed for the development of new commercial and residential ventures.¹¹³ Furthermore, Bloomberg's zoning order entailed the creation of the "High Line Transfer Corridor (HLTC), which preserved the space and light surrounding the High Line.¹¹⁴ Four years later, on June 8, 2009, the

¹⁰⁹ Loughran, 56.

¹¹⁰ "About the High Line: Fostering a Strong Community and Neighborhood," About the High Line | Friends of the High Line, accessed March 1, 2017, <http://www.theHighLine.org/about>.

¹¹¹ "About the High Line: Fostering a Strong Community and Neighborhood."

¹¹² Quintana.

¹¹³ Dr. Kate Ascher and Dr. Sabina Uffer, "The High Line Effect," Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, 227.

¹¹⁴ Ascher and Uffer, "The High Line Effect," 227.

first portion of the High Line opened to the public.¹¹⁵ The second section, which spanned the stretch of elevated track from 20th St to 30th St, opened in 2011. The final, third part of the High Line, which extends across the Rail Yards, opened in 2014.¹¹⁶ This long, linear park was a near-instant success for tourists and locals alike. As the High Line's acclaim grew, it became clear that the ripple effects would be greater than even the most enthusiastic supporters of the park had dared dream.

Project Description

In its present state, the High Line Park extends along 1.5 miles of elevated track. From the south, it starts at Gansevoort Street in the Meatpacking District, winds its way between the blocks of the Lower West Side, and then terminates at 34th Street, near the Jacob Javits Convention Center.¹¹⁷ On a given day, thousands of pedestrians make use of its paths, seating areas, and viewing platforms. Though it is a relatively new addition to the city of New York, the High Line has quickly become one of its most iconic features.



Map of the High Line¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Karen Cilento, "The New York High Line Officially Open," Arch Daily: The World's Most Visited Architecture Website, June 09, 2009, , accessed March 01, 2017, <http://www.archdaily.com/24362/the-new-york-high-line-officially-open>.

¹¹⁶ Halle and Tao, "Chapter Three: The High Line."

¹¹⁷ Cilento, "The New York High Line Officially Open."

¹¹⁸ http://www.livintheHighLine.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/MSCHNURE_1609-Shoreline.jpg.

Part of what makes the High Line so appealing is its design. The strategic placement of unique views, spaces, and moments along the park creates a dynamic sequence of experiences. When asked to describe his favorite feature of the High Line's design, landscape architect James Corner responded by saying, ". . . there's a favorite experience - it is the experience in the duration of time that it takes to walk from Gansevoort to 20th Street. You go through an amazing succession of episodes, and for me, it's this choreography and the experience of this that is really the most exciting and original part of this project."

¹¹⁹ The individual spaces along the park are certainly worthy of attention, but Corner's words suggest that, by and large, it is the journey—not the destination—that is to be celebrated.

Even so, in their effort to develop the theme of the park as a whole, the designers of the High Line did not forsake the details. As part of the green strategy of this project, the designers chose to preserve the opportunistic manner in which plants had populated the elevated track during its years of abandonment. Corner and Oudolf introduced more than 100 species of endemic plants to the new project. Rather than place these species according to the well-manicured style of the Promenade Plantee, they developed a subtle, organic landscaping system. Participating architects from DSR describe the High Line as "agritecture," or the middle ground between agriculture and architecture. Using this strategy as a guideline, they designed a sequence of paved and landscaped places, forming both discrete moments as well as a cohesive, linear experience.¹²⁰

The fluid relationship between landscape and pavement is evident across the entire length of the park.¹²¹ Linear paving bricks are offset to allow grass and wildflowers to spread out onto the path. These components taper off into planting beds, appearing to fade into clusters of bushes, flowers, and other low-lying vegetation. Even seating is an extension of the park's common, linear thread. Benches rise up

¹¹⁹ Jill Fehrenbacher, "Interview: Landscape Architect James Corner on NYC's High Line Park," *Inhabit - Green Design, Innovation, Architecture, Green Building*, September 20, 2014, , accessed March 01, 2017, <http://inhabitat.com/interview-architect-james-corner-on-the-design-of-high-line/>.

¹²⁰ Cilento.

¹²¹ Cilento.

seamlessly from the ground as an extension of the long paving bricks. Tracks and gears—fragments of the High Line’s industrial past—are left intact to receive the additions of pavers, plants, and wooden boardwalks.



Aerial View of the High Line¹²²

Despite having an extremely consistent aesthetic from one end to the other, the High Line also has several unique spaces that lend it character. One of the most iconic features of the High Line is 10th Avenue Square, where visitors can sit on wooden seating steps and look out through a large window at the thoroughfare for which it is named. Here, visitors view New York from a rare perspective—directly

¹²² https://www.theHighLine.org/assets/ways_to_give_image2-e7b432950c07ac24e63657c3716c7e03.jpg.

above one of the busiest streets on the island—and experience simultaneous connection with and detachment from the urban grid.¹²³

Other spaces, such as the 23rd Street Lawn, are the result of a widening of the High Line's path. Stepped seating and an open grassy yard create a natural point of gathering. Other creative spaces are formed by the High Line's interaction with surrounding buildings. Between West 15th and West 16th streets, for example, the High Line cuts through Chelsea Market, creating a sheltered space that hosts both informal markets as well as a seasonal cafe.¹²⁴ In each of these cases, the design was not simply an insertion of a new idea, but rather, a response to an existing condition. Tenth Avenue Square works because of a sudden bend in the High Line, 23rd Street Lawn accommodates an existing change in the structure's width, and the Chelsea Market passage forms as a result of the need to cut through an existing building. Spaces such as these are directly related to their site, and therefore give the High Line a distinct character.

The landscaping of the High Line is as ecologically balanced as it is beautiful. In order for a plant species to survive on the High Line, it needs to be capable of withstanding the pressures of hot summers and cold winters. The High Line's separation from the ground also limits soil depth to the dimensions of planters—a mere 15 inches. In this setting, any plant would have an extremely difficult time obtaining sufficient water and nutrients. Thus, Corner, DSR, and Oudolf took care to choose stress-resistant species.¹²⁵

Fortunately, the varying site conditions along the High Line allowed for a wide range of plants to be used. Zones sheltered by buildings had fostered thick vegetation and even some trees for decades, while those exposed to the Hudson from the west hosted only the hardiest of grasses and shrubs.¹²⁶

¹²³ Erika Harvey, "Throwback Thursday: 10th Avenue Square," The High Line, September 24, 2015, , accessed April 07, 2017, <http://www.theHighLine.org/blog/2015/09/25/throwback-thursday-10th-avenue-square>.

¹²⁴ "Visit the High Line," The High Line, Accessed April 07, 2017, <http://www.theHighLine.org/visit/#/features/227>.

¹²⁵ Fehrenbacher.

¹²⁶ "High Line Sustainable Practices," The High Line, , accessed March 10, 2017, <http://www.theHighLine.org/about/sustainable-practices>.

Knowing this, Corner, DSR, and Oudolf incorporated species already found living on the High Line, as well as several that were known for their ability to survive. Use of native species minimized costs associated with replacement in the event of plant failure, and it also preserved a habitat for native pollinators.¹²⁷

Corner, DSR, and Oudolf also used various design strategies to mitigate the inherent ecological difficulties of the High Line. The use of offset paving bricks for many of the park's pathways both shelters young plants and diverts rainfall back into planters for increased irrigation.¹²⁸ This, coupled with a drip irrigation system, reduces the amount of additional watering needed for the xeriscape to survive. In this regard, the High Line behaves as a green roof, recycling water and minimizing runoff into sewer systems below.¹²⁹ The High Line Park is also designed to incorporate on-site composting, which enriches soil while minimizing the need to remove organic waste from the site.¹³⁰

Both experientially and formally, the High Line Park embodies what it means to create a unified, dynamic public space. Even the smallest details, such as trashcans, lighting, and the integration of water features, were carefully considered for how they would fit in with the park as a whole.¹³¹ The High Line also pushes the boundaries of what a long, winding space can be. Through the use of carefully selected views, subtle material change, and creative landscaping, the elevated park serves as a respite from the chaos of the streets below. Moreover, it balances the best qualities of the natural and industrial worlds, resulting in a thoroughly urban, yet equally ecological public space.

Experiential Assessment

Given the High Line's unique position as an elevated park, the ways in which it is linked to the surrounding West Chelsea neighborhood is extremely important, both to its function as a public space, and to its effect on buildings and streets in the immediate vicinity. The High Line has 11 points of access

¹²⁷ "High Line Sustainable Practices."

¹²⁸ Fehrenbacher.

¹²⁹ "High Line Sustainable Practices."

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Fehrenbacher.

along its 1.5-mile length.¹³² This presents an interesting case for accessibility. On the one hand, the High Line's limited number of entrances might disqualify it from being a truly accessible space. At the same time, this very exclusivity is what allows the High Line to maintain both its unique identity and its safety record. The High Line walks the fine line between restriction and access. The few entrances allow it to remain distinct from the street, but there are still enough means of egress that the elevated space does not become dangerously isolated. Thus, the designers of the park had to be very strategic about where they placed transitions between the High Line and the street below.¹³³ Perhaps, then, the best way to analyze the accessibility of the High Line is not so much its number of access points, but rather, the nature of these thresholds.

Qualitatively speaking, the entrances to the High Line are varied. Six of the 11 access points are wheelchair accessible. Two of the entrances, both at the southern end of the park and at the 16th street elevator, have restroom facilities.¹³⁴ Given its far west location in Manhattan, the High Line also is surprisingly easy to reach by public transit. Subway stations at 34th, 23rd, and 14th street put visitors one avenue's walk from High Line access stairs.¹³⁵ Unfortunately, none of these particular entrances are wheelchair accessible. Manhattan's bus system, however, fills in the gaps where subway lines are lacking. North/South buses stop nearly every other block along 11th, 10th, and 9th Avenue, and cross-town buses drop passengers off at 34th, 23rd, and 14th street.¹³⁶ Clearly, one of the benefits of New York City is its public transportation system, which is so extensive that even interventions like the High Line, which were inserted well after transit lines were established, are still relatively easy to access by bus and train.

¹³² "Visit the High Line," Friends of the High Line.

¹³³ Cilento.

¹³⁴ "Visit the High Line," Friends of the High Line, accessed March 21, 2017, <http://www.theHighLine.org/visit/#/access>.

¹³⁵ Metropolitan Transportation Authority, "Manhattan Bus Map," map, January 2017, accessed April 1, 2017, <http://web.mta.info/nyct/maps/manbus.pdf>.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Another factor that makes these access points successful is their proximity to other features of interest in West Chelsea. In order to reach these entrances, pedestrians must walk past restaurants, Chelsea Market, and other attractions such as the Whitney Museum. In this way, the High Line is intimately connected to key features of the neighborhood. Although it is largely a new intervention in an area with a rich, long history, it manages to connect rather than overshadow the features that give West Chelsea its character.

The High Line is also successful in terms of its functions as a place of sociability and activities. Tourists and locals alike take leisurely strolls along the elevated path. Sunbathers and nappers occupy lounge seats on warmer days, and wider areas like the 23rd Street Lawn are often populated with picnickers.¹³⁷ In addition to fostering informal activities such as these, the High Line is also the staging ground for cultural and arts-related activities. Carefully curated art and food vendors sell their goods at key points along the park.

The Friends of the High Line website also has a calendar full of community activities. These range from stargazing to backpacking training classes to a tour that walks visitors through the park's history.¹³⁸ There seems to be tremendous effort by Friends of the High Line to enrich the park with programming and social events. From a sociability perspective, the High Line is successful in that it is a place of gathering. People come to the park with family and friends, often for the express purpose of enjoying the space. It is a place that individuals elect to visit by choice, and from the perspective of the municipality, it is a source of pride for the city of New York.

Comfort & Image: A Matter of Wealth and Race?

The discussion of comfort and image is rather contested regarding the High Line. In defining this experiential category, PPS speaks of the importance of a space's ability to present a positive image, but

¹³⁷ "Visit the High Line."

¹³⁸ "The High Line Activities Calendar," The High Line, accessed April 7, 2017, <http://www.theHighLine.org/activities>.

what constitutes a positive image is highly subjective. Numerous critics of the High Line would go as far as to argue that the park is not a comfortable space, particularly for those whose race and/or socio-economic standing put them at a disadvantage. Kevin Loughran, sociologist and long-time critic of the High Line, sees the park as an impetus for economic growth that caters to the interests of the wealthy and powerful, rather than a space that exists for the common public good.¹³⁹ He goes on to argue that the High Line is largely the result of a so-called “growth machine” of political, social, and cultural elites, who put in their time and effort in a manner that propelled growth within the city.

At the crux of Loughran’s complaint is the growing trend of social and economic neoliberalism in the development of public space. Broadly speaking, neoliberalism is a social and economic policy model that places economic control in the hands of private entities rather than public ones.¹⁴⁰ This model is realized in parks such as the High Line when these spaces become partially or completely run by private entities. As many critics will attest, this model threatens social equality in urban populations.

Put simply, the neoliberalization of green spaces privileges certain parks above the broader goal to deliver accessible green space to all. This trend is evident in the High Line, which has received more resources, funding, and attention from the municipal government than other public urban spaces.¹⁴¹ The park is the most expensive per acre within the city of New York, and it also has the highest number of paid staff per acre. Furthermore, the High Line receives generous funding, both public and private, that allow it to function at the level that it does.¹⁴²

While this certainly seems unbalanced, what makes this neoliberal approach so harmful? Nate Millington, geography professor from the University of Kentucky and critic of the High Line, puts it well when he speaks to the type of green space that the High Line makes available to the city: “In its limited

¹³⁹ Kevin Loughran, "Parks for Profit: The High Line, Growth Machines, and the Uneven Development of Urban Public Spaces," *City & Community* 13, no. 1 (March 2014): 49.

¹⁴⁰ "Neoliberalism," Investopedia, 2017, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/n/neoliberalism.asp>.

¹⁴¹ Millington, "From urban scar to 'park in the sky': terrain vague, urban design, and the remaking of the New York City's High Line Park," 2327.

¹⁴² Ibid.

acreage and excessively managed green areas, the High Line substitutes an urban park that provides services or green space for neighborhood residents for a tourist destination that relies on one-time visits and framed views of the city.”¹⁴³ In short, Millington believes that parks like the High Line prioritize profit and tourism over the relationships between these green spaces and their respective neighborhoods.

While these privileges of the High Line certainly make it a compelling space, a clear side effect of its neoliberal overtones is the rampant inequalities that they produce.¹⁴⁴ For instance, while projects such as the High Line and the Brooklyn waterfront are given abundant funding and municipal support, public spaces in less affluent neighborhoods rarely receive the same attention or funding, largely because they do not feed into urban growth initiatives. The High Line itself is not the problem. Rather, it is simply part of a larger construct, neoliberalism, which produces increasingly unequal development.

Loughran’s claim that the High Line represents inequality and elitism in public space is rooted in a long history of uneven resource distribution in urban areas. Green spaces were first incorporated into cities to address the perceived harmful effects of urban life. In the decades that followed the Civil Rights movement, the narrative surrounding public parks became increasingly political. Underprivileged, non-white communities often found their access to green space lacking, while predominantly white communities received disproportionate amount of funding for parks and gardens.¹⁴⁵ Loughran argues that similarly to these older parks, the High Line symbolizes systematic inequalities among citizens as well as those in power.¹⁴⁶

At the 2009 opening ceremony of Section 1 of the High Line, mayor Michael Bloomberg praised the elevated park, saying, “The [board’s] ruling is a great win for all New Yorkers. It allows us to implement our plans to preserve this valuable historic resource, create a much-needed public open

¹⁴³ Millington, 2327.

¹⁴⁴ Loughran, "Parks for Profit: The High Line, Growth Machines, and the Uneven Development of Urban Public Spaces," 56.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

space, and strengthen our city's economy." For Bloomberg, the High Line's value lay in both its cultural role and its function as an economic catalyst.¹⁴⁷ The re-opening of the High Line as a public amenity certainly brought about the promised economic boost. However, Loughran argues that both the layout of the park and manner in which it is run communicate the message that this public space is intended primarily to both shape the habits of and serve the privileged echelons of society.¹⁴⁸

The inequalities that Loughran sees within the High Line are manifested in what he refers to as "spatial privilege." Loughran defines spatial privilege as "the hegemonic ability to make claims on public space, based on high standing within socially constructed and intersecting hierarchies of gender, race, class, sexuality, and national origin."¹⁴⁹ He sees the intersection of privilege and public space as one in which the social and economic advantages of one group are emphasized over those of other groups within the population.¹⁵⁰

The High Line is characterized by both surveillance and exclusion, two factors which play directly into Loughran's "spatial privilege."¹⁵¹ He cites the management of the High Line as an example of these factors. The design and maintenance of the High Line create a deterministic plan for "consumption, leisure, and social control." Vendors are privatized.¹⁵² Those which are permitted to operate their business on the High Line must undergo an intense vetting process that can take months, and must also pay prohibitively high application fees. The High Line is also very strict in the management of its space. There is no litter to be seen; even trash cans for vendors are limited, and must be kept out of view.¹⁵³ In regard to surveillance, the park has a full-time fleet of security personnel. Even artists are carefully screened before they can exhibit their work along the park. For a public park, there is an

¹⁴⁷ Loughran, 56.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 57.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 61.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 62.

¹⁵² Ibid., 52.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 58-59.

unusually high level of commercial and social control afoot.¹⁵⁴

How exactly does heightened security and exclusion play into spatial privilege, and why is this a problem? Initially, the stringent rules regarding vendors, waste management, and occupation of the High Line seem to result in safe, comfortable spaces. Loughran would likely agree that these factors do have positive effects. His problem, however, is in the fact that of the vendors that are permitted to operate on the High Line, nearly all of them cater to the tastes of the predominantly white upper middle class. The High Line appears to promote one kind of consumption—the privileged kind—while doing little to attract people of different cultures, socioeconomic status, or demographics.¹⁵⁵

Loughran rightly notes that the park represents political and societal patterns that continue to favor the privileged. Neoliberal perspective on public space *do* widen the disparity between well-funded and poorly-funded parks, as he argues, and I agree with him that the High Line certainly benefits from this system. Despite these shared viewpoints, I beg to differ on some of the other points he makes. Loughran expresses frustration at the high level of security and regulation surrounding the High Line, arguing that measures such as these result in a rigid, strictly-controlled park that may make members of the lower class feel uncomfortable. While his argument may have some merit, he fails to consider the benefit and even the necessity of such regulation.

When a space is elevated above the street as the High Line is, it is isolated from public view, and can therefore very quickly become a place for nefarious activities to take place. In order to ensure that the High Line did not regress into a hotspot for crime or delinquent activities, it was necessary for Friends of the High Line to organize a system of control and surveillance. Regulations on trash disposal, alcohol consumption, and the types of activities permitted also make sense when one thinks of what could go wrong in the context of an elevated park. For example, unaccounted-for trash might contaminate the already delicate ecosystem of the park's planters. Inebriated behaviors could prove

¹⁵⁴ Loughran, 52.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 62.

life-threatening at a thirty-foot free-fall above the street. Disagreements aside, I believe that Loughran presents a compelling case for the functions of race and social class in relation to public space.

References to his writings repeatedly come up in my research, leading me to believe that his writings have had a great deal of influence on the rhetoric surrounding the High Line.

Alexander Reichl, political science professor at CUNY Queens College and also a critic of the High Line, takes a similar stance to Loughran regarding the High Line's lack of racial diversity. This problem can be seen clearly when one compares the new park to an even more well-known New York public space: Central Park. A key difference in the development of Central Park and that of the High Line is that the former was intended to help assimilate immigrant, lower class workers into society, whereas the aim of latter was to transform a derelict remnant of the industrial era.¹⁵⁶

Currently, there is little racial or ethnic diversity to be found among those who frequent the High Line. In field studies conducted at various public spaces in Manhattan, it was found that at the High Line, more than 80% of visitors are white, compared with 60% at Central Park. Additionally, the remaining 40% at Central Park tend to be much more diverse than the 20% non-whites at the High Line, most of whom are Asian. There were also proportionally four times the amount of Black and Latino people at Central Park than at the High Line.¹⁵⁷ This discrepancy is concerning, even though West Chelsea is one of the more white neighborhoods in Manhattan.¹⁵⁸

One explanation for this disparity might be that the neighborhoods surrounding Central Park simply have different demographics than those near to the High Line. Research shows that this is true, but not in a way that explains the homogeneity of the latter. Reichl writes, ". . . Chelsea is actually more diverse than the broad areas flanking Central Park, not only on the Upper East Side but on the Upper West Side as well. As one of the whiter neighborhoods in Manhattan, Chelsea is known more for its

¹⁵⁶ Alexander J Reichl, "The High Line and the Ideal of Democratic Public Space," *Urban Geography* 37, no. 6 (March 21, 2016): 904.

¹⁵⁷ Reichl, "The High Line and the Ideal of Democratic Public Space," 912.

¹⁵⁸ Reichl, 912.

LGBT diversity than it is for its racial diversity. A third of Chelsea's residents are people of color, and more than one in five are Black or Latino."¹⁵⁹ The Upper East Side adjacent to Central Park is one of the whitest neighborhoods in the borough, with nearly 80% percent of its residents in that racial demographic. Despite this homogeneity, only 69% of those in Central Park are white. Even in this so-called "white" area of town, minorities are more likely to enjoy public space than they are in West Chelsea.¹⁶⁰

It is worth noting the manner by which Reichl collected this data. He and several other researchers spent hours tallying the number and race of people who entered these parks at certain times and locations. While direct observation has its merits, it does not tell us whether those who used the green spaces were locals or tourists. Perhaps the percentage of locals and residents does not make a difference, but I am more inclined to think that it does, and perhaps that is the reason why the demographics of those using the High Line seem so skewed compared to that of other New York parks.

If the High Line is indeed unwelcoming to minorities, what factors contribute to this sentiment? Reichl does not offer a concrete answer to this question but, in agreement with Loughran, he does suggest that both the design and programming of the park fail to take into account social diversity. He believes that this failure is evident in the design aesthetic of the park. The recycled, haphazard landscape of the High Line celebrates industrial decay. Those who have benefitted from the emergence of a post-industrial economy may be intrigued by this kind of space, but for those whose livelihoods suffered as a result of this trend the memory may not be so positive.¹⁶¹

Millington, another critic whose complaints about the High Line are similar in nature, goes as far as to accuse the High Line of romanticizing an era that, for many, included violence, poverty, and systemic injustice.¹⁶² For Millington, if the design of a public space seeks to explore the post-industrial,

¹⁵⁹ Reichl, 912.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 915.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 919-20.

¹⁶² Millington, 2334.

urban wasteland aesthetic, then it should be undertaken with great consideration for the economic and political processes that led to urban abandonment in the first place.¹⁶³

How does this relate to race? The correlations are weak, at best. Millington suggests that minorities would be among those most negatively impacted by the presence of urban decay, but he fails to give a substantial reason for making this claim. History tell us that white as well as minority workers suffered from deindustrialization, so along Millington's line of reasoning, working class individuals of all races should feel a similar discomfort in the context of the High Line. The problem of romanticizing deindustrialization is one of social class, not race.

There are problems with other explanations for the racial disparity as well. Reichl suggests that deterrence of minorities may be a matter of the High Line's position above the street. Studies of urban spaces have shown that pedestrians are more likely to enter a space if there are fewer barriers to entry. From the street level access points, one cannot see the above destination until he has already committed to climbing the stairs or taking the elevator. For those who have access to tourism magazines and articles regarding the High Line, this uncertainty is negligible, because they are more or less aware of what waits at the top of the stairs. However, to an individual who lacks access to such knowledge and who is not familiar with the High Line, there is no good reason to ascend an ambiguous staircase to the unknown above.¹⁶⁴ As a result, those with less access to information may be less likely to consider visiting the High Line in the first place.

In my opinion, Reichl's argument that the High Line's position as an elevated park is a barrier to social inclusion is completely unsubstantiated. If West Chelsea is as diverse a neighborhood as he says it is, then people of color, along with white residents, would have undoubtedly witnessed the construction processes, the neighborhood activism events, and the signage indicating that a park was to open on the High Line. Furthermore, simply because someone does not have access to travel magazines or brochures

¹⁶³ Millington, 2335.

¹⁶⁴ Reichl, 920.

does not mean they cannot learn about the existence of the High Line. Rather than back his argument with data, Reichl backpedals into a position of one who makes broad, sweeping claims without any real basis for doing so.

More unsettling is the fact that, in suggesting that people of color do not visit the High Line because of these so-called barriers, Reichl takes an infantilizing stance against an entire race. Essentially, his argument implies that non-white people are helpless to learn about new and unfamiliar things. While I do agree that the homogeneity of the High Line's users is problematic, I find many of the proposed explanations to be unsubstantiated at best, or at worst, offensive to people of color.

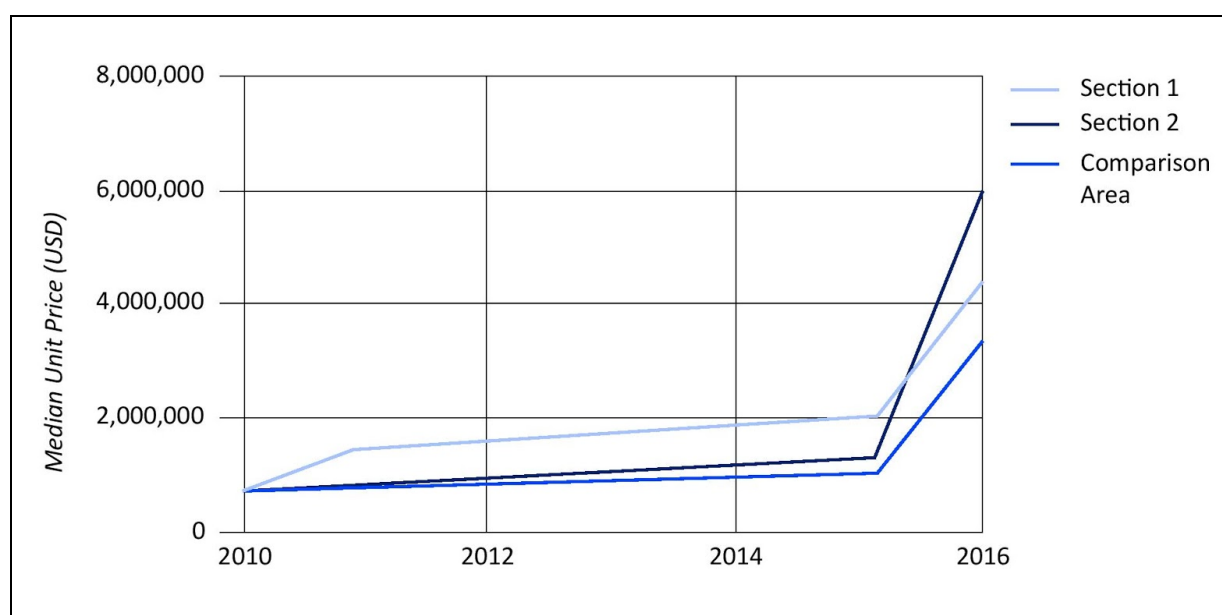
Yes, the lack of diversity on the High line is alarming, but so far, the high-profile studies of this topic, many of which I have referenced in this chapter, fail to meet the basic standards of academic rigor that would make them believable. To attribute the High Line's problems to there simply being white people present, as both Loughran and Reichl do to some degree, is simply not a good argument. Correlation does not equal causation. Especially in light of there being no clear substantiating data, the claim that the mere presence of white people is a deterrent to minorities is tenuous. The relationship between race, privilege, and public space is important and should be studied. Unfortunately, the most widely-published critiques neither offer clear solutions, nor do they empower the demographics for whom they advocate.

While issues of comfort and image are disputed, the High Line appears to fulfill the requirements for access, activities, and sociability. If anything, it is perhaps *too* successful regarding sociability; the park's popularity among locals and tourists alike leads to rather crowded conditions when the weather is nice. The park was conceptualized with the goals of salvaging abandoned infrastructure, creating a memorable public space, and in both ways, it seems to have succeeded.

Crime & Economic Impact

Just as the High Line has been an experiential success, it has also brought about unprecedented

economic growth to the West Chelsea neighborhood. When Friends of the High Line conducted a study of the High Line's potential, it predicted that over the next twenty years, the businesses that opened because of the park would create \$250 million in revenue, and that the High Line itself would attract 400,000 visitors annually. These estimates were quickly proven wrong. Since its opening, the High Line has welcomed an average of 4 million tourists each year. Nearly \$900 million in revenue and \$2 billion of added economic activity has also sprung up since the High Line opened. It is difficult to say if the High Line is directly and completely responsible for this surge in development, but it likely played a role in the process.¹⁶⁵



Median Unit Sale Price (2010-2016)¹⁶⁶

With the economic boom has also come a rise in real estate values, especially for properties directly adjacent to the High Line. According to StreetEasy, a New York real estate agency, the median value of housing units along Sections 1 and 2 of the High Line reached \$1,422,899 and \$877,152, respectively, in 2011. This increase put these zones significantly ahead of the surrounding

¹⁶⁵ John Rainey, "New York's High Line Park: An Example of Successful Economic Development," *The Leading Edge*, Fall 2014. 2-3.

¹⁶⁶ <http://streeteasy.com/blog/changing-grid-high-line/>.

neighborhood, whose median resale price stood at \$736,301. By 2016, those numbers rose to \$4,419,205 and \$6,058,587, respectively. Currently, property values along the High Line are anywhere from 130% to 214% higher than those of the blocks to the east. Not only are these properties now worth substantially more than comparable properties nearby, they have also gained value more quickly. From 2011 to 2016, the properties lining the park experienced a 50.6% rise, while nearby areas only saw growth of 31.4%. Even in the midst of New York City's luxury real estate boom, it seems probable that the High Line still has had a significant effect on property values.

One source of added value to the neighborhood was the construction of dozens of new developments along the High Line corridor. Since 2006, 29 projects have arisen in the park's vicinity, and more are under way.¹⁶⁷ Such developments include the Whitney Museum at the park's southern end, luxury residential towers designed by high-profile architects, and most recently, a large-scale development at the Hudson Yards, the railyard near the third and final section of the High Line. The Hudson Yards project is not a direct result of the High Line, but it will certainly be enhanced by the presence of the park. Once the Hudson Yards project is completed, it will include a dramatic, final parkland at the northernmost end of the High Line. This public space will cater to a variety of programs, from office space to residential to even a K-8 school.¹⁶⁸ So far, these projects have created 12,000 new jobs, 4,000 of which are permanent, and the High Line will likely generate even more opportunities as development continues.¹⁶⁹

Development in West Chelsea has also had a positive effect on crime. On the High Line itself, there has been a remarkably low occurrence of crime. As of 2011, there were no reports of major

¹⁶⁷ Kate Ascher and Sabina Uffer, *The High Line Effect*, Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, CTBUH Research Paper, 2015, 226.

¹⁶⁸ "Building Hudson Yards," Hudson Yards New York, 2017, accessed March 18, 2017, <http://www.hudsonyardsnewyork.com/about/building-hudson-yards/>.

¹⁶⁹ Ascher and Sabina Uffer, *The High Line Effect*, 226.

incidents occurring within the park.¹⁷⁰ For reference, Central Park currently experiences 2.31 crimes daily per 100,000 people. This is rather low number of incidences, as Central Park's crime statistics technically make it safer than 71% of public parks in the United States, but cases like the High Line, where absolutely no major crimes have been reported, are virtually unheard-of.¹⁷¹

One of the reasons for the park's remarkably clean record is its surveillance, both formal and informal. Formally, security cameras abound. Park Enforcement Patrol officers keep watch on the High Line daily, where the only "crimes" they encounter are minor quality of life infractions, such as drinking or riding a bicycle (both activities are forbidden on the High Line).¹⁷² From 2009 to 2011, patrol officers wrote 326 summons for these minor violations, compared with 3,275 in Central Park for the same time period. Considering its relatively small size and limited access, the High Line actually experiences more of these infractions per square foot of park space, but this may simply be a factor of its significantly stricter rules of conduct. The informal surveillance of this park is inherent in the fact that it is lined on either side by apartments. With very few exceptions, these buildings give residents a front-row seat to the events taking place on the High Line, thereby putting any would-be criminals in an uncomfortably high-profile position.¹⁷³

The High Line may also be safe because of its design. Since the park has limited points of access, it would be difficult for would-be criminals to plan effective getaways from robberies or other crimes requiring some level of stealth. This physical feature of the park also means that hours of operation are not merely a formality. In the case of most New York City parks, areas are roped off or lightly patrolled after hours, but there are rarely insurmountable physical barriers that prevent people from entering. At

¹⁷⁰ Michael Wilson, "The High Line Park is Elevated. Its Crime Rate is Anything But.," *The New York Times*, June 10, 2011, , accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/11/nyregion/the-high-line-park-is-elevated-its-crime-rate-is-not.html>.

¹⁷¹ "Annual Reported Crime in Central Park," Areavibes, 2017, accessed March 18, 2017, <http://www.areavibes.com/new-york-ny/central-park/crime/>.

¹⁷² Wilson, "The High Line Park is Elevated. Its Crime Rate is Anything But."

¹⁷³ Wilson.

the High Line, in contrast, one would find it nearly impossible to enter once it has closed, short of climbing the thirty-foot structure, because all of the access stair gates are locked shut.

Community Empowerment

One can clearly see that the High Line far surpassed Bloomberg's hopes that it would catalyze an economic boom within the neighborhood. Of course, in the midst of such progress, one may wonder if residents of West Chelsea had a significant voice in the transformations that both accompanied and followed the renewal of the High Line. Per a study of the participatory design of the High Line, it is apparent that Friends of the High Line worked hard to make sure this happened. According to David and Hammond, the High Line's renovation was a bottom-up project; it entailed the collaboration of the municipal government and locals rather than the one-size fits all approach that is often seen in top-down approaches.¹⁷⁴

This push for community participation by Friends of the High Line is evident in the early planning phases of the project. In the Open Ideas Competition that led to the selection of DSR and James Corner's design, Friends of the High Line accepted nearly 720 submissions, many of which came from neighborhood residents. Once the top designs had been chosen, Friends of the High Line hosted a community discussion regarding the top contenders, gathering input from nearly four hundred participants.

These meetings were not simply for publicity, either. The initial feedback session was meticulously recorded through video and notes, the latter of which were later made available to subscribers of the Friends of the High Line newsletter. As subsequent decisions were made following this first meeting, Friends of the High Line used both its website and newsletter to regularly update residents on the High Line's progress. It is worth noting, however, that internet access is not a universal given, and

¹⁷⁴ Ariel B. Alvarez, "New York City's High Line: Participatory Planning or Gentrification?," ed. Melissa W. Wright, Ph.D (Master's thesis, The Pennsylvania State University, 2012), 3.

that because of this, the voice of those of lower socioeconomic standing was probably not well-heard.¹⁷⁵ Inequality of this kind, unfortunately, is a common byproduct of participatory design. There will always be those whose voices are heard more loudly than others.

Records of meetings and community correspondence indicate that Friends of the High Line made significant attempts to engage the West Chelsea community throughout the design process for the High Line's redevelopment. While this may be true, it is still fair to wonder if the resulting park disproportionately favors the interest of the neighborhood's urban elite. For instance, while it would certainly be erroneous to blame the High Line for a history of gentrification that dates back to the 80s, there are indications, such as hiked real estate prices and business transitions, to believe that the park furthered this process.¹⁷⁶ As Millington puts it, "it is difficult to overstate the role played by [the High Line] in the consolidation of state-sponsored gentrification within the mayoral administration of Michael Bloomberg."¹⁷⁷

Is the High Line a successful public space? Those who say yes would probably cite the park's stellar design, negligible crime rates, and the growing number of businesses, developments, and opportunities that have arisen because of the park's success. Critics would point to the High Line's lack of diversity, as well as the negative effects of gentrification, as evidence that the park is not as deserving of praise as the City of New York would like us to believe. As an outside observer, I see the merit in both sides. I agree that the High Line could use more diversity as much as I believe it is a wildly successful public space. When I weigh the arguments of critics and supporters alike, however, I find myself more inclined to believe that the High Line is a success.

Gentrification has its downsides, but given the trends in neighborhoods across the rest of

¹⁷⁵ Alvarez, "New York City's High Line: Participatory Planning or Gentrification?," 8.

¹⁷⁶ Alvarez, 10.

¹⁷⁷ Nate Millington, "From urban scar to 'park in the sky': terrain vague, urban design, and the remaking of the New York City's High Line Park," *Environment and Planning A* 47, no. 11 (September 01, 2015): 2327, accessed March 17, 2017, doi:10.1177/03085X15599294.

Manhattan, such change in West Chelsea was inevitable. At the very least, the High Line provides a cultural focal point around which these transitions occurred, setting it apart from the myriad of characterless developments that tend to populate up-and-coming areas of New York. Looking at what West Chelsea was back in the 80s, what it became at the turn of the twenty-first century, and what it is today, one cannot deny that the neighborhood has become a safer, more wholesome place. There are improvements to be made, and Friends of the High Line would do well to consider ways in which the park can be more inviting to minorities, but even in light of this, it is still safe to say that the High Line is a positive addition to the cultural and social life of Manhattan.

Downstream Effects

Having witnessed the positive reception of the High Line as well as its economic contribution to New York City, municipalities across the country have attempted to replicate its success. In 2015, Chicago's 606, also an elevated park situated on abandoned rail structures, opened to the public. Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Atlanta are working toward similar ventures.¹⁷⁸ The High Line's effect has not gone unnoticed by the international community, either. Currently, the city of Rotterdam is poised to transform an old electric railway into yet another linear green space.¹⁷⁹

Critics rightly point out, however, that the simple combination of derelict urban infrastructure and world-class designers does not always yield the success seen at the High Line. In fact, there were specific entities and conditions in place that allowed the High Line to become an iconic space. First, the High Line's location in the Meatpacking District and Chelsea, both of which are embedded with eclectic architectural character, allowed it to build on a pre-existing sense of place. Ironically, the very architecture that made these districts unique was also packed in with parking lots, gas stations, and other back-of-house programs. When development began, these lots were quickly sold and transformed

¹⁷⁸ Kate Ascher and Sabina Uffer, *The High Line Effect*, Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, CTBUH Research Paper, 2015, accessed February 02, 2017, 226, <http://global.ctbuh.org/resources/papers/download/2463-the-high-line-effect.pdf>.

¹⁷⁹ Ascher and Uffer, *The High Line Effect*, 226.

into high-end residential towers.¹⁸⁰ There was much less pushback from landmark restrictions or preservation initiatives, as these support programs held virtually no historical or cultural value for the city.

Additionally, zoning played an important role in allowing the High Line to become a destination within the city. Bloomberg's aforementioned 2005 designation of the "West Chelsea Special District" allowed these parking lots to become residential towers, hotels, and galleries. View corridors protected the immediate air space around the park, while generous funding, both public and private, resulted in adjacent projects by world-class architects and developers.¹⁸¹ In many ways, the High Line was the result of a perfect combination of municipal policy, private funding, and neighborhood context. This is not to say that other cities cannot replicate the High Line, only that to do so requires much more than an innovative design aesthetic and an abandoned urban framework on which to display it.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the High Line to future endeavors is its use of abandoned infrastructure to create something new and exciting. An exact copy of the park may not work in other contexts, but the underlying principles of preservation and adaptive reuse can. Take, for instance, the Lowline project. This project, as yet unbuilt, poses an interesting theoretical concept of an underground park. The designers of the Lowline are seeking to revitalize an abandoned trolley station on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.¹⁸² The neighborhood layout, demographics, and culture are all different from that of West Chelsea, but perhaps if the designers behind the Lowline take a similar approach of activism and participatory design, they will yield a public space that is every bit as fitting and successful as the High Line.

¹⁸⁰ Ascher and Uffer, 226.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 227.

¹⁸² "Project - The Lowline," The Lowline, accessed April 09, 2017, <http://thelowline.org/about/project/>.

CHAPTER 3 | CONCLUSION

What can be learned from Santo Domingo and West Chelsea? In one regard, both projects show the benefit of municipal support, both in funding and implementation. Santo Domingo was in many ways a product of aligning political events and dedicated leadership. Even with Fajardo's success with the electorate, he could not have accomplished what he did without the help of the city council, which until his term had been completely uncooperative regarding such matters. Similarly, the High Line came to fruition largely because the Bloomberg administration chose to back Friends of the High Line. Without the political clout that came with the mayor's approval, David and Hammond would have never been able to raise the necessary funds, nor navigate the legal entanglements surrounding the then-abandoned High Line.

Both projects also demonstrate that, whether a design is to be implemented in Colombia or in the United States, community participation must be prioritized. Participatory design in Santo Domingo restored public trust in a government known for corruption, and it also legitimized a marginalized community. Rather than entering the neighborhood and telling residents what and how they needed help, members of the Fajardo administration listened first—and it made a tremendous difference. Likewise, the community meetings surrounding the conceptualization of the High Line allowed for virtually anyone to voice her concerns or share ideas about what she believed the park could be. In both instances, community engagement gave residents ownership over these projects, helping to ensure that they would be well received and would actually serve a purpose. Revitalizing a neighborhood is as much a political and social process as it is a design process. Without the politics, a project may never be realized. Similarly, without the necessary social considerations, a project may be ill-received by the public.

The comparison of these two interventions also reveals differences in the priorities surrounding each. When the Fajardo administration was tasked with improving the city of Medellín, they chose to

focus on its poorest community. The changes that took place in New York, in contrast, occurred in one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city. I do not want to make assumptions about entire countries or regions based on two case studies, but I do think it would be interesting to see if other projects in Colombia are targeted like those in Santo Domingo, and if projects in the States are planned mostly in areas not unlike West Chelsea. If that is indeed the case, then it raises the question as to why Colombia and the United States have such different mentalities when it comes to creating public space.

Is one mindset correct, and the other flawed? Not in the least. Thinking along such a strict dichotomy simultaneously diminishes the negative aspects of one and exaggerates the positive features of the other. These projects were, in my mind, equally successful in their own context. The *Northeastern PUI* was contrived with the goal of assisting a struggling, underrepresented community, and it accomplished that well beyond anyone's expectations. The High Line was designed in hope of preserving history, creating a much-needed public space, and boosting the local economy. It did all three of these things with excellence.

Ultimately, the question we should be asking is not, "What is the *single* best way to introduce public space into a city?", but rather, "What is my *goal* in introducing public space, and how do I tailor my approach to make sure that this goal is achieved?" There are a variety of ways that one can go about inserting design into the urban fabric, but unless they have a clear focus in mind, it can be hard to produce something that is both useful to the community and well-designed. Santo Domingo and West Chelsea remind us of the variability of approaches, teaching us that great public spaces can arise from a wide range of circumstances, so long as the municipal, social, and functional aspects of the endeavor are accounted for. Specifically, they demonstrate that design alone is not enough to transform a community. It is certainly essential, but its efficacy is limited unless it is accompanied by the right circumstances, support, and players, who are willing to push back against the status quo in order to make greatness happen.

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Rachel Larson was born in Houston, Texas, on October 23, 1993, exactly six minutes before her twin sister. She spent her childhood living in three countries and travelling to nearly thirty. Since returning to the United States for college, Rachel has worked on earning a Bachelor of Architecture as well as a Bachelor of Arts Plan II Honors. She will graduate in May and then go on to find herself in the rugged mountains of Alberta, Canada. After this, she will defy the wishes of her World Lit professor and go work for The Man on Wall Street. She will, however, continue to exclusively drink not-from-The-Man coffee. She has standards, after all.